The Princess Pourquoi

Margaret Sherwood

REFERENCE LIBRARY * HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO. * BOSTON, MASS.
Archive
Collection

This book may not leave the Offices
and if borrowed must be returned within 7 days

By Margaret Sherwood

THE PRINCESS POURQUOI. Illustrated. $1.50.

THE COMING OF THE TIDE. With frontispiece. 12mo, $1.50.

DAPHNE: An Autumn Pastoral. 12mo, $1.00.

HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & CO.
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

THE

PRINCESS POURQUOI

EVERY DAY HER BIG EYES GREW WISER

THE PRINCESS POURQUOI

BY

MARGARET SHERWOOD

ILLUSTRATED

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & COMPANY
MDCCCCVII

COPYRIGHT 1902 AND 1903 BY CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

COPYRIGHT 1907 BY THE S. S. McCLURE CO.

COPYRIGHT 1906 AND 1907 BY HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & CO.

COPYRIGHT 1907 BY MARGARET SHERWOOD

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Published October 1907

CONTENTS

THE PRINCESS POURQUOI 1

THE CLEVER NECROMANCER 43

THE PRINCESS AND THE MICROBE . 81

THE SEVEN STUDIOUS SISTERS . . 131

THE GENTLE ROBBER 175

*** The Princess Pourquoi, The Princess and the Microbe, and The Seven Studious Sisters appeared first in *Scribner's Magazine*, The Clever Necromancer in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and The Gentle Robber in *McClure's Magazine*. They are here reprinted by the courteous permission of the publishers of those magazines.

ILLUSTRATIONS

EVERY DAY HER BIG EYES GREW WISER *Frontispiece*

SIDE BY SIDE THEY WALKED TOGETHER 22

"IT'S GOT TO BE KILLED," SAID THE PRINCESS STURDILY 101

"WHAT!" THUNDERED HIS MAJESTY . . 142

CAME RIDING FROM ALL PARTS OF THE KINGDOM 148

HE BEGAN TO WEAR THE LOOK OF THOSE WHO SEE MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE 185

FOR SOME HALF SMILED AND HID THEIR SMILES AS BEST THEY COULD 203

A GLIMPSE OF AN HERETIC BEING BURNED TO DEATH 210

THE PRINCESS POURQUOI

THE PRINCESS POURQUOI

ONCE upon a time, in a country very far away, a new princess was born. As is usual in such cases, the King, her father, and the Queen, her mother, held a great christening feast, to which were invited all the crowned heads for miles around, all the nobility of their own kingdom, and the fairies whose good wishes were considered desirable. In the middle of the ceremony, as is also customary, a very angry little old lady, with a nose like a beak, burst into the room.

"May I ask why I was not invited?" she demanded. "These are here," and she pointed to the fairy who rules the hearts of men, and to the fairy who rules circumstance. She herself was the fairy who rules men's minds.

"You!" stammered his Majesty. "Why, it is only a girl. We — we thought you would be offended. Later, if a son should be born" —

"You thought!" shrieked the enraged little creature, gathering her shoulder-shawl about her. "You thought nothing whatever about it. I am insulted, and I shall be revenged. Before anything yet has been given to this child I shall curse her" —

"Oh!" begged the crowned heads and the nobility.

"Yes," said the fairy, stamping and growing angrier, "I shall curse her with a *mind*."

"Anything but that," groaned his Majesty.

"Not that for a woman-child," moaned the mother, from under her silken coverlid.

"Yes," said the fairy, and her wicked black eyes snapped over her withered red cheeks. "She is a woman-child, and yet she shall think. She shall be alien to her own sex, and undesired by the other. She shall ask and it will not be given her. She shall achieve and it shall count her for naught. Men shall point the finger at her like this" (and she pointed one skinny forefinger at the King), "and shall whisper, 'There goes the woman with brains, poor thing!' As for your Majesty, in her shall

you find your punishment. She shall think what you do not know, and divine what you cannot find out. Now," added the wicked fairy, turning to the two godmothers who stood by the child's cradle, "see if you, with all your giving, can do anything to lessen the curse that I have spoken," and she rushed away like a whirlwind, leaving every face dismayed.

The fairy who rules circumstance stood by the cradle and spoke. Her face was the face of one who wavers two ways, and her voice was unsure.

"The child shall have fortune," she said, "good-fortune, so far as is consistent with what has already been given. I wish," she added apologetically, "that I had spoken first."

"Why did n't you?" grumbled his Majesty under his whiskers, but he dared not speak aloud, for he was afraid of circumstance, being a king.

The other fairy stood silent, looking down into the child 's face.

"But she shall know love," she said softly, after a little time. The sleeping princess smiled.

From the time that it was spoken the curse was felt. Before the baby could talk, she would lie in the royal cradle, fixing upon the King, her father, and the Queen, her mother, when they came to see her, eyes so big, so wise, so full of question, that his Majesty fled, and her Majesty covered her face with her hands, wondering what it could be that the child remembered and she

forgot. The first word the Princess uttered was "Why." She said it so often that presently, through the whole length and breadth of the kingdom, she was known as the "Princess Pourquoi," though her real name was Josefa Maria Alexandra Renée Naftaline.

"Why," she asked, when she was very small, "did trees grow this way, instead of the other end up? Why did people stand on their feet instead of on their heads? Why did you like some people better than others, and why could n't it be just as easy to like them all alike?"

She was a good little girl, but she had all the credit of being a bad one. She saw through what she was not intended to see through; she heard what she was not meant

to hear; she understood what others wished to keep hidden. Therefore it came to pass that she was very lonely. She had a way of climbing affectionately up to the neck of some favored person, drawing down the head for a loving embrace, and then asking some terrible question, whereupon she was quickly put down on the floor and left alone. There she would sit, with so grieved a look in her big blue eyes that the next one who entered would pity the golden-haired baby, and would take her up, only to become a victim to some other unanswerable inquiry.

When she was four and five, her questions were theological or philosophical. "Why was she made at all, if she were as naughty as people said? Would n't it have been less trouble not to have made her, or

to have made her good? Why were you you, and I I? Who was going to bury the last man?" The king's philosophers stood about in silence and gnawed their beards. They were terribly afraid of the little girl with chubby legs and dimples. As she grew older, her questioning turned more toward social matters and practical affairs. "Why," she asked his Majesty, her father, who also was afraid of her, "did he say that he loved his neighbor and yet make war? Why was he king? Was it because he was wiser and better than other people?" She looked at him so long and so doubtfully that his Majesty wriggled in the royal chair. He felt that this wretched child was endangering his power. Sometimes he was so miserable that he would willingly have abdicated, but

he could not abdicate his little daughter. Besides, he was a king, and he did not have any place to go. Other children had been granted him, a line of little princesses, who wore long, stiff embroidered robes; and a nice, fat, stupid little prince, who was a great comfort to his father. All these other princelets obeyed the court etiquette and wore the court clothes, and never felt the ripple of an idea across their little minds, but they could not atone to the King for the thorn in his flesh known as Josefa Maria Alexandra Renée Naftaline.

The Princess Pourquoi objected to wearing a stomacher, for she liked to lie flat on her face in the park, watching the ants. She objected to making the court bow, and smiling the court smile, and put-

ting out her hand to be kissed. Why should she? The ladies-in-waiting could only tell her, "It was so." She objected to taking mincing walks in the royal gardens among the peacocks, and sometimes, to the horror of all the court, escaped and played games with peasant children outside. She disliked her lessons. Why should she say, like a parrot, what her governess told her to, when there were birds and beasts and creeping things outside to study, and a library inside full of things really worth learning? So she went her own way, growing wistful and more lonely, and every day her big eyes grew wiser and fuller of secrets. Those who saw her crossed themselves and murmured, "The Curse!"

Once his Majesty held a great festival to

celebrate the thousandth anniversary of the founding of his kingdom by his imperial ancestor, Multus Pulvius Questus, who had conquered 500,000 men with his own arm, and had laid the cornerstone of a great principality. The festival was a brilliant one, and all the royal neighbors came. Just before the ceremonies began, in the large audience chamber, the governess of the Princess Pourquoi, stung by questions she could not answer regarding the achievements of Multus Pulvius, burst out with:

"You are a naughty little girl, and if you act this way, the fairy prince will never come."

"I don't want a fairy prince," replied the Princess proudly, looking at her governess with steady blue eyes. "I want a real one."

A little prince standing near, in a red velvet suit, looked at her very hard.

As time went on, the Princess Pourquoi was not quite content. She was too eager for that.

"I shall be happy when I find out," she said sadly one day.

"Find out what, your Highness?" asked the chief philosopher.

"It," answered the girl, and she pointed toward the horizon. "What it means, where we came from, what you are for and I am for."

The chief philosopher took a golden goblet of wine that a page had brought him and drank it to its dregs. Perhaps he meant this for an answer. Then he winked at his fellow-philosopher, and the two went arm

in arm down a long path between box hedges in the garden. The Princess entered the royal palace and knelt at the feet of the King.

"Your Majesty," she asked, "why are people who do not know anything called wise men and philosophers?"

It was soon after this that the King made a great proclamation, offering the hand of his daughter to any one who would answer one of her questions satisfactorily. Suitors came by scores, although her unfortunate propensity was known, for the Princess was growing to be very beautiful, and his Majesty the King was very rich. The aspirant to her hand usually stood before the royal throne in the presence of the court, and the Princess was ushered in by the major domo.

The Princess Pourquoi did not trouble herself to find new questions; she only asked some of the old ones over again, and the Crown Prince of Kleptomania, the Heir Apparent to the throne of Rumfelt Holstein, the reigning King of Nemosapientia, besides dozens of others, went sorrowfully back to their homes, rejected. When it was found that the ordeal was terrible, and the result always the same, the suitors gradually ceased coming, and the Princess Pourquoi remained a great matrimonial problem, aged fifteen, on the hands of her parents.

It was at this time that the Princess resolved to study, and to achieve something that was really her own. People should respect her, not because she was a princess, but because she could do great things. She

pleaded with his Majesty until he ordered the greatest scholar in his kingdom to act as tutor for her, the greatest sculptor to teach her modeling, the greatest painter to teach her how to draw. For five long years the Princess worked and was happy, but the eyes of her mother were full of pity when they rested on her, and the passers-by in the streets whispered, "Poor thing!" Mothers drew their little ones closer to them when they saw her, and said: "Take care! It is the woman with a mind!" And the young ladies of the court, when they came out into the park with their long trains, and saw the Princess seated by herself with a book under a tree, said to themselves, under their breath: "Like that, too, but for the grace of God!"

At one of the annual exhibitions of works of art in the city was a statue, anonymously exhibited, that won great praise. It was of white marble, and represented a woman standing on tiptoe and reaching up and out with one hand. The fingers closed on nothing, and the look of the face was disappointed. Perhaps the greatest skill was shown in the rendering of the eyes. Their expression was baffling, and no one could say whether the woman was blind or not.

"What masculine strength of handling!" said the artists.

"What wonderful inner meaning!" said the philosophers.

The Princess Pourquoi came one day to visit it, and stood a long time watching the

people who saw it. The outspoken praise made her eyes glisten. A workingman, in a peasant's blue blouse, strolled near. There was fine powder of chipped stone upon his sleeve.

"There is great power there," said the workingman, "but the work is crude."

The peasant was hustled out of the room, and an admiring crowd gathered about the statue of the groping woman. Some one whispered that it was not a man's work at all, but the work of a woman. Surprise, incredulity, disapproval passed in waves over the faces of the crowd. The rumor was established as a fact, though the woman's name was withheld. Every one could see faults now.

"We suspected it from the first," said

the philosophers. "The lack of virility is apparent."

"You can see the woman's carelessness in regard to details in every fold of the drapery!" said the artists.

The Princess Pourquoi listened. Presently she faced the crowd.

"It is my work," she said simply. Then she summoned her lackeys and ordered her carriage, and disappeared before artists or philosophers could find any knot-holes to crawl through.

Their Majesties, the royal parents, were greatly pleased when they heard of this scene. Perhaps this condemnation of her statue would bring their daughter to her senses.

It was very fortunate that just at this time there came rumors of the advent of

the Fairy Prince. From Bobitania, a kingdom leagues away, he was reported to be approaching, presumably to woo the Princess Pourquoi. The King and the Queen chuckled in secret together the day a messenger arrived to announce the advent of his Royal Highness, Prince Ludwig Jerome Victor Christian Ernst, Heir-Apparent to the throne of Bobitania. This was a very great principality, indeed. Surely the Princess would for once act like other people, and would, for the sake of all that was to be gained, profess herself satisfied in regard to her questions.

The royal household was ordered into its very best clothing. The King and the Queen, the Prince and the Princesses, shimmered in velvet and jewels. The pages were

resplendent in yellow and silver. The philosophers were profound in rich black. The woolly white dogs of the ladies-in-waiting were combed and tied with the colors of Bobitania, crimson and black. Everywhere, in jewels, in flower devices, among the hangings on the wall, were displayed the arms of Bobitania, a crimson star on a dusky background.

After the ceremonies of greeting were over, when Prince Ludwig Jerome Victor had bent before the King and the Queen on their throne, and had had presented to him all the royal offspring, the Princess Pourquoi was requested to show his Highness the garden of flowers, that his eyes might be refreshed after his long journey. So side by side they walked, talking to-

SIDE BY SIDE THEY WALKED TOGETHER

gether, between long rows of stately chrysanthemums, white, yellow, and red, she very erect in her brocaded gown, whose deep blue folds swept the grass, he all smiles and obeisance, in a slashed suit of scarlet and black. The waiting-women, by two and two, came on behind.

As they paced the garden, the peacocks retreated slowly, a statelier procession than they. They passed a fountain where a single workman was busy sculpturing a figure from a block of gray granite. His face was shaded by a cap, but the splendid action of strong arms and muscular shoulders was visible. The Princess paused, and the waiting-women turned, pretending to be busy with the box of the hedges or the pink-tipped daisies at their feet. The face of

Prince Ludwig Jerome Victor grew uneasy, for he felt that the hour for his questioning had come. But the Princess was not thinking of him, for her eyes were following the workman's fingers.

"Why blue jean for one man's arm and velvet with pearls for another?" she said half to herself. "Why hunger for that man, and for me surfeit?"

"Most gracious Princess," answered Prince Ludwig Jerome Victor, secure in his reply, "the earth with all upon it is glad to lie as dirt beneath the feet of the most beautiful lady in the world."

He fell upon one knee and kissed her hand. She looked down intently into his narrow, upraised face.

"Queen among princesses," he begged,

"question me and accept my answer. From far Bobitania I have come to woo, and if I fail, I die. What is the question I must answer?"

"You have answered," said the Princess. "Rise."

The hand of the workman had paused, uplifted, with a sculptor's hammer in its grasp. There was a queer little smile upon his face below the shadow of the cap.

The waiting-women paced in silence behind the Princess back to the presence of the King.

"Most august Sovereign," said the Prince, bending his knee in the royal presence, "I have come to place my kingdom at your daughter's feet. Deign to ask her if I have found favor in her eyes."

"What say you, my daughter?" asked the King, his delight shining through his face. "Is it not a noble prince and a fair offer?"

"My Lord and Father," said the Princess Pourquoi, bending in courtesy, then standing erect, more haughty than before, "it is no prince, but a man with a lackey's soul. He may come to reign, but a king he can never be. As for my hand, he may not again touch it. I go to make it clean."

Then she turned and walked, in a great silence, between the parted lines of frightened people, out of the audience-chamber and away.

How Prince Ludwig Jerome Victor Christian Ernst went away in great anger, how the royal apologies were presented in vain, how the Princess Pourquoi was imprisoned

for three days in her chamber with no books to read and was held in deep disgrace by all the court, is a long story, and one that would take much time to tell. But the Princess only smiled serenely, presented her duty to her parents, saying that she was deeply grieved if her necessary words had hurt them, and, the first day she was free, went walking in the royal garden alone.

The artisan was there at the fountain, working at the same stone figure. The Princess stood in silence and watched him. At her approach he had taken off his cap and had laid it on the grass. Yellow autumn leaves fell on his blue blouse and on her crimson velvet robe.

"Do you like to work?" asked the Princess Pourquoi timidly.

A look of amusement crept into the man's keen, dark eyes, and his lips quivered with a suppressed smile.

"Yes, your Highness," he answered, making an inclination of his head. And he went on working.

"Why?" asked the Princess Pourquoi.

"Gracious Lady and Princess," replied the artisan, "I do not know."

The Princess stared at his deft fingers and the quivering muscles of his arms. Then she strolled away to pick a late white rose, and presently wandered back, as if forgetful where her feet were going.

"I have seen you before," she remarked absent-mindedly.

He bent again, and murmured something respectful that she could not hear. The

chance given him to continue the subject he did not improve.

"Once," continued the Princess, "in a hovel among other hovels at the foot of the hill. Through the open door of the sick-room where I stood, I saw you sitting at a poor man's table, sharing his black bread and muddy ale. Why were you there?"

"He was my friend," said the artisan. "His hut was then my home."

"Why do you wear a workingman's blouse and carve in stone?" demanded the Princess abruptly.

"Madame and Princess," replied the man, "it is the work that I have chosen," and he went on chipping away fine flakes of stone.

The lady walked away again, this time following a wayward peacock across the grass. The workingman paused to look after her, with the sunshine falling on her brown hair. Then he picked up a chisel that he had dropped, and, in doing so, bent to kiss the grass where her feet had rested, for she had trodden very close.

When the Princess came back the next time, she spoke with the quiet air of one who is greeting an old friend.

"You criticised my statue," she remarked. "You called it crude."

"Whoever reported my poor opinion to the Princess," said the man, "had evidently heard but part of what I said."

The Princess showed no curiosity as to the rest.

"Why were the others so unjust?" she demanded. "They praised my work when they thought it was a man's. They turned upon it and called it bad when they knew a girl had done it, and did not yet know that it was a princess. What can one do when it is all so unfair?"

The artisan answered not a word, but went on chipping, chipping, bending all his energy to the curve of a finger. The Princess watched with eyes in which all the blue of the autumn sky and all the shining of the autumn sun seemed centred. When the young man at length looked at her, her head was thrown back, and her face wore the look of one who feels her blood to be royal.

"Do you know," she asked sternly, though the expression of her eyes was of

one who pleads, "what fate is reserved for the man who answers even one of my questions satisfactorily."

"Gracious Lady and Princess," he said humbly, "I have answered nothing, for I did not know. My mind, too, has questioned ceaselessly into the injustice of many things. I only" —

"You only," said the Princess, with a sweep of her hand, — "you only *kept on working!* Come!"

Refusing to walk at her side, he followed at a little distance, stepping unsurely, as one would walk in a dream. The lackeys looked at him and sneered as he went. His Majesty the King and her Majesty the Queen looked down in impatience from the throne when they saw the Princess

Pourquoi leading in a peasant clad in blue jean.

"Some injury to redress!" muttered his Majesty. "Always a new grievance! I never have time to sleep or think."

The Princess swept across the audience-chamber with the air of one whom nature, not circumstance alone, had made a queen. She bent before her royal parents, then laid her hand upon that of the artisan.

"Your Majesties will remember," she said, "the decree made regarding me when I was fifteen years old. This man alone has answered one question of mine to my satisfaction. I come to beg" — and her face wore a frightened look, yet shone with a sudden gleam of mischief — "I come to beg that he incur the penalty."

Her Majesty fainted and was carried from the room. His Majesty turned purple, and the calves of his legs swelled with rage. The ladies-in-waiting hid their faces behind their hands and whispered, "Shameless!" The philosophers shook their heads and muttered, "The Curse!" As soon as the King could find his voice he thundered: "Away with him to the donjon keep! Let the executioner come and do his duty! Cut off the head of the impostor who would steal my daughter's hand!"

"He is no impostor," said the Princess scornfully. "Whatever his birth may be, his soul is royal."

The men-at-arms came forward to seize him, but the Princess flung herself between him and them. He put her gently aside,

and stepped forward to defy them all, but his eyes rested all the while on her with a look that made great throbbings in her wrists. The clash of arms in the chamber was interrupted by the sound of commotion outside. Shouts of "Make way!" were heard. Then there were cries of: "A messenger, a messenger from his Grace of Bobitania!" Free way was left in the crowded hall for a man in a travel-stained riding-costume, who entered and hurried toward the throne.

"May it please your Grace," he panted, "his Majesty the King of Bobitania desires to make known that the Heir-Apparent to the throne, who disappeared many weeks ago, has not been discovered. News has just reached Bobitania that his valet, who

stole much of the Prince's clothing after his disappearance, has been here representing himself to be the Prince. Let it therefore be known that the person who of late called himself Prince Ludwig Jerome Victor Christian Ernst of Bobitania is an impostor, being the son of a liberated serf, and the grandson of a swineherd."

The nobles, the ladies-in-waiting, the philosophers crowded about the messenger. While he was explaining that Prince Ludwig Jerome Victor was eccentric, though deeply loved by every man, woman, and child in Bobitania; how he had insisted on learning a trade; how he had often disappeared for a time, living in disguise among his poorest subjects — the Princess was looking at the stone-cutter's face and smil-

ing. She forbore to cast one glance of triumph upon the King.

The messenger took his leave of his Majesty and turned to go. Suddenly he fell upon his knees and kissed the hand of the peasant.

"My Lord the Prince!" he cried. And the vaulted ceiling gave back the cry, for all the people in waiting took it up and shouted for the Prince who wore blue jean.

"Why did you do it?" asked the Princess Pourquoi, two hours later, when she stood in the garden with her betrothed, the real Ludwig Jerome Victor Christian Ernst, Heir-Apparent to the throne of Bobitania.

"Gracious Lady and Princess," he answered, laughing, "I wanted to be real."

Then he told her how, many years ago, he, a tiny princeling, had heard a naughty little princess, in that very audience-chamber, demanding, not a fairy prince, but a real one.

"I took the only way I knew to become real," he said. "Have I found favor in your eyes, O beloved of my heart?"

"How long beloved?" asked the Princess anxiously, for she was much ashamed of the way in which she had wooed him.

"All my life long," he answered. And the peacocks never told how he kissed her.

His Majesty the King and her Majesty the Queen were delighted with the match. The royal father spent hours in telling the young Prince how great a delight his daughter's mind had always been to him,

and how he should miss companionship with her when she was far away in Bobitania. All the court agreed with their Highnesses that they had had suspicions of the valet-prince from the very first, and the lackeys mentioned to the Princess the fact that from the first they had suspected the stone-cutter to be something more than appeared on the outside. The Princess Pourquoi became very popular up and down the length and breadth of the kingdom, and the philosophers, as they sipped their wine in the afternoon sunshine, said over and over what a wonderful child she had been, and how they had always prophesied a great destiny for her.

So there was a great wedding, the preparations for which shook Christendom to

its foundations. All the crowned heads that were known were there. Barbaric kings from beyond Bobitania graced the ceremony in gorgeous embroidered robes sewn with diamonds and rubies and pearls. No colors that are known could paint the procession with its rainbow tints of banners and of clothing. Man has not senses enough to take in a description of the food that was provided. Peacocks' brains, served in golden dishes, were the simplest viands there.

The Princess Pourquoi was attired in white velvet, with a train eleven feet and six inches long; her lord and master glowed like a tropical bird in scarlet, and Christendom exclaimed that there had never been so beautiful a pair. While the trumpets

were blowing and the dishes were rattling, and the after-dinner speeches of the philosophers were reaching their most blatant point, Prince Victor was quietly telling his bride that he had no intention of giving up his occupation of stone-cutter, and none of sitting upon his father's throne unless requested to by all the inhabitants of Bobitania. They talked in snatched whispers about the drawing-schools they would establish for the poor, and the model cottages that should be built from end to end of Bobitania, and they made great plans for the Princess's further work in sculpture. What else they said in sweet whispers, I shall not tell, for it was no one's affair but their own.

The most magnificent guest of all was

the fairy godmother who had cursed the bride in her cradle. This wicked person was attired in black samite, made with incredible puffs and a train. She had a stomacher picked out with jet, and wore a very stiff ruff underneath her hooked chin. Her general expression was very fierce, but once she was heard to murmur, hiding a pleased smile behind her bony hand:—

"A pretty age of the world, when not even the curse of a mind can harm a woman!"

THE CLEVER NECROMANCER

THE CLEVER NECROMANCER

Once, a long, long, long, long, *long* time ago, there was a city by the sea, and it was called Marmorante. Little gray mists floated down the gray streets, past the tall gray houses with carven windows and doors; pale, silvery fogs wrapped tower and spire, and oftentimes low, dark clouds hung sullenly for days together over gabled roofs and dull red chimneys; nor could the bravest winds that blew nor the swiftest golden sunbeams drive mist and cloud and fog away.

In Marmorante lived all manner of folk: a duke, a count, two marquises, and several squires; there were merchants many, with white-sailed ships that cut the waves; there were wool-combers and flax-beaters and haberdashers and marketmen; but most of all there were women: countesses, duchesses, and stately marchionesses; wives of merchants, wool-combers, haberdashers, flax-beaters, — women, women, women, maidens innumerable, and hosts of little girls. There were little girls with flaxen ringlets, little girls with long braids of yellow hair; dark-haired, slender maidens, maidens with white arms, maidens with blue eyes, brown eyes, or gray — every kind of maiden that ever lived, in life or in story.

Life went on quietly in the city by the sea. In the gray mornings count and countess talked amicably together in their great hall, and wool-carder and his wife gossiped cheerily as they rolled and carded the white fleece; in the gray afternoons Sir Knight walked in the castle garden among the flowers with my lady, and the butcher's 'prentice met his maid by the postern door: by embroidery frame and spinning-wheel, by tiring-room and kitchen spit, all was gray peace.

Then one day, when the clouds hung low, a raven croaked above the castle wall; black rooks cawed dismally with hints of coming disaster; and bats, mistaking clouded noon for night, flew out with squeaks and gibberings at noonday — yet

nothing happened. Peasants' carts came creaking, as was their wont, to the city gate, with blue-smocked Jean or yellow-trousered Pierrot driving roan mare or piebald steed, and bringing bags of grain and great rolls of tanned skins to market. Old women with their flower baskets on their arms came nodding and courtesying, giving hollyhock or rose for toll to the porter, who would not say them nay because of their skinny arms and hungry faces. At last came one who was not of the line of sun-browned farmers, withered dames, or ruddy boys who drove in flocks of sheep.

It was a man, tall and long, and thin of face, clad in doublet and hose of sober drab, and he had naught with him save three small, transparent bags or bladders, one

rose-colored, one purple, and one yellow, which seemed to be filled with but empty air.

"What bringest hither?" asked the porter, in a surly voice.

"Naught save my rattle," answered the tall man in drab; and with that he struck the bags together, so that there came out a tinkling sound wondrous cunning and small.

"Is danger therein?" said the man at the gate, holding back. "Mayhap they go off, like powder, and do harm."

Then the tall man smiled a strange, three-cornered smile, for his chin was long and protruding, and strained his lips that way.

"Ay," he confessed, "they go off, but they do no hurt;" then he paid his penny

toll and went unmolested in. The porter stood long, with arms akimbo, and looked after him.

"'T is some fool," said the porter, and went back to his mug of ale.

The sad-hued man went on through the narrow streets that let in only a strip of the sky's blue, and anon he came to the open market-place, where little was doing that day, for the flowers were wilted, and the vegetables for the most part gone; only the lambs that were left bleated piteously now and then. The stranger sprang upon a counter where wheat had been sold, and he struck his little bags together, so that they rattled merrily as he called aloud: —

"Come, hear, hear, hear! Come, hear the words of wisdom I shall say, the great-

est words that shall ever meet your ears. Come, hear, hear, hear! To-day I speak, and to-morrow I may not: 't is the chance of a lifetime, and not to be overlooked. Come, hear, hear, hear!"

Now with the rattling of the bags, and the rattling of the man's voice, many people came running hither: squire and 'prentice and count, marchioness and merchant's lady, and the cook from the castle, all hurrying toward the empty sound. Soon a great crowd was gathered, of men and of maidens, of women with white wimples and folded kerchiefs, and of little girls with yellow hair.

"Come, hear, hear, hear!" repeated the man, in slow singsong, watching the people with his narrow blue eyes which were

rimmed with red; then, so swiftly that none could see, he bent his head and touched his lips to the transparent bags. He spoke, and lo! a miracle, for out of his mouth came a beautiful, iridescent mist of words that floated and floated and broke against the gray fog, and rested across the eyes of an elderly woman who stood buxom and comely, and fell like a halo upon the fair hair of a young girl standing bareheaded in the sun, and flashed like an opal, flickered like a flame, so that at last the whole market-place was full of floating color; yet all that the man had said was, "Be good and you will be happy," with variations.

"A necromancer!" said the red-faced butcher under his breath.

"A prophet!" cried the countess, as a floating bit of the colored mist lighted on her lips.

"I never heard such truth," said the fair-haired maiden, with a bar of iridescent cloud across her eyes.

Watching and silent the Necromancer stood, the three-cornered smile upon his lips. They prayed him to do his trick again, but he shook his head and would not.

"To-morrow," he said, "at two P. M.;" and he smiled at the shower of golden coin that rained into his bell-crowned hat.

When they were sure that nothing more was forthcoming, they went marveling away; but all about the silvery fog that clung to the steeples, and the gray mists that lay along the streets, and the clouds

that hung sullenly above, still hovered little rosy flecks of flame and hints of rainbow color.

Day after day the Necromancer stood in the market-place, and put his lips secretly to his colored bags, and spoke. He had searched all the copy-books of the kingdom, and had taken familiar truths, such as: "The good die young;" "To be selfish is to be miserable;" "Haste makes waste;" "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush;" and he clothed them in rainbow colors and breathed his mist about them, so that they stalked in beauty wonderful and strange, and the folk who listened did not know their own ideas when they met them face to face, because of the garment of many-colored words in which they came.

Then the women went mad throughout the city, mad for the loud-sounding voice and the rattle of the bags, rose-colored, purple, and yellow. By her broidery frame the Countess Angélique forgot to draw green thread of silk through the dim web, and in her lap her white hands lay idle. Walking to and fro by her spinning-wheel, little Jeanne wove into the blue yarn the glittering phrases of yesterday, so that the strands tangled and knotted at the spindle. Margot, the cook, forgot her chickens roasting on the spit, but turned and turned them by the glowing coals till they were burned and black; and Joan the butcher's wife could no longer tell haunch of venison from flitch of bacon, but greeted customers with a vacant stare, for her mind was quite gone,

gone the way of the wind, after the wonderful bits of colored fog.

Now the fair-haired maid who had stood awed in the market-place on the day when the enchanter came was a rich merchant's daughter, and her given name was Blanche. She was betrothed to one Hugh of a neighboring city, and he came often to Marmorante, lodging always at the sign of the Red Dragon. Thus had been his wooing, as he stood one day with the maid and her father by the lattice that looked forth on the street.

"Wilt have me?" he asked, and the words cost him much, for he was a man of plain speech, and oft of no speech at all.

The maid stood in the sunshine and looked upon him, and he thought her a

goodly sight. Green was her gown, and cut square at the throat, and with it the color of her eyes seemed green, and he knew not if her hand or her neck were whiter.

"I could give thee white velvet to thy train," he stammered, and the old man, her father, stood and watched.

"Dost love me?" asked the maid, for she was one that had heard old ballads sung; and the man opened wide his honest eyes.

"Ay, surely, else had I not asked thee to wife."

"Then will I wed thee," said the maid, and the wooer stood gazing at her, not daring the kiss that was in his mind.

"'T is a good chaffer," said young Hugh.

"We shall get on rarely together;" and thereafter, as heretofore, he had no eyes for aught save the maiden's face. All this was a month agone, and to-day, when he came again, the maid would have it that he must needs go forth with her to the market-place to listen to this wonder; and he followed, willing enough, for he would have gone into the very dragon's teeth after the hem of her gown. Howsoever, the thought of going to listen to mere speech seemed to him but folly.

When they came to the open place, and he saw what was there, his eyes opened wide, and he whistled softly for sheer amazement, for never yet had he seen so great a concourse gathered together. There were women in velvet and in satin,

women in homespun and in blue jean, even women in rags; and there were maidens as many and as lovely as the leaves upon the maple tree when it turns to rosy color in the fall, maidens dull or bright of hair as the case might be, but always bright of eye and of cheek. Far and near they gathered, crowding close together; many stood on bench or on counter, straining white necks forward; and all the windows that looked upon the market were crowded with fair faces. Presently, with long and pensive stride, came the lean man in drab; and as he came, honest Hugh heard the sudden, sharp breathing of the maid at his side, and felt her lean forward as if she were one quivering ear.

What followed puzzled the young man

sorely. It was one of the great days of the Necromancer: forth from his mouth came a violet speech in the form of a bubble, and it floated over the heads of the people in lovely changing shades that ranged all the way from deep purple to the palest tint that is not yet white. Midway across the gray cloud it burst, and its gleaming bits drifted hither and yon, and the speaker smiled as he saw the eager fingers raised to catch the tiny vapors which melted as soon as touched. Forth came another and another; it was a day of loveliest froth. Anon came a speech of the color of gold that shimmered and shone in the sunlight, and burst into sparkles a thousand ways, and so golden bubble followed golden bubble. All the little girls with floating hair

or yellow braids ran after them, with hands lifted high to catch them before they burst, and the least maids wept because the taller ones caught more than they.

Young merchant Hugh stood watching, with his hand upon his chin.

"'T is a strange sight," he murmured to himself. "Jugglers enow have I seen in the East, and many of their devices have I learned, but I have seen naught like this."

Then he turned to his betrothed.

"Dost know the trick, Blanche?" he asked, but when he saw her face, he knew that there was somewhat amiss with his words. All awed was she, and in her eyes was the look of one who had seen a vision; and, glancing about, he saw that the other women and maids wore the

same expression. He came home pondering, having noted the shower of coin that had fallen into the Necromancer's hat; nor could he understand, for he gave ever good measure for the gold that was given him. Also he was sore troubled, for his betrothed had no words for him, only looks of high disdain.

"Well, daughter," said the old merchant, as the two came in, "what saith the prophet to-day?"

"Oh!" cried the maiden, "all was wonderful and full of beauty. Each day is his discourse more marvelous than yesterday's."

"But what was it all about?" he asked, laying his hand upon her hair, for he was tender of her.

"How could I presume to tell?" she asked, with a grieved red lip. "'T was too wonderful to put into words;" and she swept from the room, with no glance for her lover.

Young merchant Hugh, to whom the very rushes on which the maiden stepped were dear because of his great speechless love, gazed after her, jealous of the look upon her face, and cruelly wounded by her scorn.

"I will find out the trick," said the young man to himself, between set teeth; and he was one who ever made good his words.

Now the maiden Blanche was glad when her lover begged to go forth with her the next day and the next, at two P. M.

"Mayhap he may learn something of this wondrous speech," she said wistfully, thinking to herself that it would be sweet to be wooed in violet words and words of the color of gold. When he bent shyly to kiss her before they went, with lips that trembled for the great love they might not say, she drew stiffly back, nor would she thereafter permit touch or caress, and much she spoke of the joy of a maiden's life that would leave time free for thought; yet she took him gladly with her for a week of days. Ever he listened, as one spellbound, nor once removed his glance from the Necromancer's face; and he was keen of eye, and wont in traffic to detect word or look of fraud, and he saw what no one else had seen.

"I have it!" he cried, and he slapped his fist upon the palm of his left hand. "Those be bags of many-colored words that he hath with him, and he but sucks them up and breathes them forth."

That day he sent his sweetheart home with Dame Cartelet, that lived hard by, and was as besotted as she on the man with the magic words; then he went and lay in wait in the street through which the Necromancer passed each day in going home; and as he waited, he turned back his velvet cuffs, and felt lovingly of the muscle of shoulder and arm. So it was not long before a tall man in drab went running through the narrow streets on the outskirts of the town, crying and wringing his hands, and the rattling bags of rose

color, and purple, and gold were gone from his neck.

"Oh, my vocabulary!" he wailed. "Oh, my bags, my bags, my bags! What am I but a man undone without my bag of adjectives!"

The dogs and the children that ran at his heels did not understand, nor did smith and weaver as they stood in their doorways.

"Oh, my other bag, my bag of epithets, of polysyllábic epithets!" cried the fugitive as he ran.

A squealing pig joined the chase, and the men children and maid children who ran after laughed aloud. The women who watched from lattice or stone doorstep were of those who, by means of ten skill-

fully selected adjectives from the rose-colored bag, and a dozen golden epithets from the bag of yellow, had been made to gape and quiver with the sense of the birth of new truth, yet they failed to recognize the juggler, for iridescent mist and ruddy vapor had vanished from his head and shoulders, and they saw naught save a lean and ugly man fleeing under a gray sky ; and, hearing, they yet did not understand his cry of deep dismay.

"Oh, my exclamation points, my lost exclamation points ! Oh, my pet hiatus that laid all low when nothing else would avail !" — and so he passed out of their sight, and out of the city of Marmorante.

At the sign of the Red Dragon that afternoon, young merchant Hugh was

closely locked in his room. Behind great iron bolts he sat upon a three-legged stool, and worked with the colored, rattling bags.

"'T is well that men have devised this thing," he said, holding a mirror before his face, as he sucked air from the bag of rose; "else could I not see if all goes well." And his heart was well-nigh bursting with joy when he saw that the breath of his mouth was even as the breath of the Necromancer upon the air. Then he slipped downstairs and begged for a cup of ale, and as the maid served him in the kitchen, he blew out a whiff from the bag of gold, and of a sudden her face became as the faces of the women who stood in the market-place under the spell of the juggler, and Hugh was glad.

The next day he hid the bags in a neck-

erchief of fine silk, and went to the house of his sweetheart, asking to see her; but when she came, it was with a face set and cold, and she paused with the great oaken table between them.

"Hugh," she said, unsmiling, "I have been thinking."

"'T is foolish work for a woman," he answered stoutly.

"That which thou dost say but confirms my thought," she answered, still more coldly. "We cannot be wed; waking and sleeping have I considered this matter, and thus have I resolved."

"Now, why?" cried honest Hugh bluntly.

"We have so little in common," said Blanche.

"Thou shalt have all," he stammered, forgetting, in his hurt, the magic bags. "Why, 't is for thee I send forth all my ships. I will be but thy pensioner."

A shadow of pain passed over the maiden's face.

"I mean not goods nor possessions, nor any manner of vulgar things ; 't is of mind and soul I speak, and ours be far apart."

"My goods be not vulgar!" cried young merchant Hugh. "Rare silks and cloths from the East have I, and purest pearls, for thy white throat. No common thing is there in all my store."

Then the little foot of Blanche tapped impatiently on the stone floor.

"'T is of no avail that I try to make thee understand! I say there be depths in my

nature that thou mayst not satisfy; also am I full busy this morning and must beg to be excused" — and with that she drew open the heavy oaken door, leaving him in the long room as one dazed.

Then he bethought him of his bags, and drew them out too late, taking a whiff from each as a sob rose in his throat. Suddenly the fair hair of Blanche appeared again in the doorway, and she smiled as a stranger upon him.

"I forgot to say that I wish thee all manner of good, and great prosperity," she said amiably.

Then out of Hugh's mouth came a purple speech, and a speech of the color of gold; and little iridescent mists floated through the air, while a rose-colored bub-

ble rested for a moment on the white eyelids of the maiden. The dull-paneled room was as the breaking of a rainbow; yet all he had said was, "Wilt not wed me, Blanche?" But he said it in rose color and purple and gold.

"What have I done?" cried the maiden sorrowfully; and he rejoiced to see that the look upon her face was as it had been when she had listened to the Necromancer's philosophies and faiths.

Then he turned and smiled, saying: "I love thee, Blanche," and he spoke in the juggler's speech, which made a glory on the maiden's hair, and about her gown of green. With outstretched hands she came toward him, and she laid her head upon his breast, smiling up at him.

"I was mad but now, Hugh," she breathed. "Our two souls be but one."

"Wilt come with me to the market-place this afternoon?" he asked.

"Nay," sighed the maiden. "I care not for the market-place, for I am happy here, where I have found my home."

"I speak there," he said bluffly, "at two P. M."

"Thou!" and the maiden's laughter rang out like the touch of silver bells, "and of what?"

"Of phases of occult thought," he answered gravely.

"Ay," cried Blanche, and she raised her face to kiss him. "Ay, Hugh, be sure that I shall be there when thou dost talk philosophies."

The young merchant was good as his word, and that afternoon he stood in the market-place upon a counter, rattling the juggler's bags as he waited. As before, men, women, and maidens came, by tens, by twenties, by hundreds, till there was no spot where he could look without meeting a pair of wistful eyes.

"It looks to be but plain Hugh, the merchant," whispered one to another.

"Hath he undertaken to sell his wares here?" asked one.

"He hath choice pearls," whispered a maiden who was not yet wholly given over to occult thought.

But Hugh had begun to speak, and faces of wonder were lifted to him, for he was strong of lung, and the breath from the

magic bags went farther than ever before.

"Our friend the Necromancer is indisposed, and I must take his place," he began. "Like him, I have chosen a theme from the depths of human thought; and now, hear! hear! hear!"

Then eloquence poured forth from the man's lips so fast, so full a stream, that the very welkin was rose-tinted, and a great rainbow seemed to overspread the sky. Gray clouds above the tallest spires broke into tints of opal, and all the air shaded into the violet and purple of exclamation points, and of the pet hiatus, which was hard to work, but came well off. Golden glory haunted carven door and window, and words of flame crept around the tracery

of arch and gable. Women sobbed for very joy ; others wrote madly on their tablets; maidens gasped with red lips slightly opened; never, during the whole lecture season, had come so big a wind from out the bags, and honest Hugh blushed with mingled shame and triumph when he saw the face of his betrothed, for it wore the look of one who had seen the white vision of naked truth.

Following the fashion of the Necromancer, he had taken a maxim, and had dressed it up so that men knew it not, and so that it came forth as revelation. All that he had said from the first to the last was the truth that he knew best : "Honesty is the best policy;" but this was the way in which he had said it, with constantly shifting color :

"Glory awaits the equable! All-hails are the portion of him, who, unswerving, with eyes upon the path ahead, with lofty head erect, perambulates his chosen path through this world's tangled wilderness, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, though golden cohorts beckon. The goal is for the upright feet. The crown waits. . . . What matter if the victor be sobbing and breathless, so that he be conqueror?" (Observe the hiatus.) "So saith golden-tongued Plato; so saith heavy-browed Aristotle of persuasive speech; so saith Aulus Gellius, withdrawn in his inner truth, and his brother, Currant Gellius, whose essence clings; so say the holy fathers, subtle Basil, myriad-minded Chrysostom; so saith the copy-book."

When the speech was over, and the bags hidden away, Hugh bore as best he might the tears and congratulations of the women, their murmured plaudits, and inspired looks.

"'T is the first time I have ever failed to give honest measure," he said shamefacedly to himself as they flocked about him.

That night, as he sat with the maiden and her father, he spoke of departing on the morrow with a ship that would sail for Morocco to be gone many months, and his sweetheart came to him, creeping into his arms.

"Do not leave me, Hugh," she pleaded. "It is so far away."

"I must go, little one," he answered,

smoothing her fair hair. "Men sit not ever by the fire to hear tabby purr."

"Say them again," she pleaded, "say again the words thou didst speak this morning, that I may have them with me when thou art far away."

"Far in illimitable recesses of time and of space," he began shamefacedly, "before phenomena existed, thy bodiless soul and mine met and mingled as one"—

"Where hast learned that jargon, Hugh?" asked the old merchant, with a loud guffaw.

"Hush!" said Hugh, with loving hands upon the maiden's ears so that she might not hear. "All is fair in love, father!"

But Hugh was still an honest merchant, and never in his long and happy life did he use the stolen vocabulary in bargaining, or

to gain dishonest advantage in trade. Only, when the face of Blanche, his wife, grew sad, he would take out the colored bags, which he kept secretly locked in an iron chest, and then the old smiles would come back to her beautiful face, and with them the look of awe wherewith she regarded her husband, as the mist of purple, and the flecks of rose color, and the bubbles of gold, fell on hair and eye and ear.

THE PRINCESS AND THE MICROBE

THE PRINCESS AND THE MICROBE

THE Princess Olivera Rinalda Victorine sat on a stone seat by the mermaid fountain in the royal gardens, crying bitterly because she was not a prince. The sun was warm, the water splashed merrily over the mermaids' tails, and not far away two infant counts, an archduckling, and a baby baroness were playing on the green grass, but the Princess would have none of their game of tag. She only howled with her mouth open, and paused for breath, and howled again. Then Lady Marie Fran-

çoise Godolphin and the Duchess Louise of Werthenheim, who were pacing the garden paths by box hedge and rose bed (Lady Marie was superb in pink chiffon over white silk, and the Duchess wore blue embroidered tulle looped with clusters of artificial lilies), frowned and whispered to each other that the naughty child ought to be punished, which was manifestly unfair, as it was all their fault. Never would the Princess Olivera Rinalda Victorine have thought of being wickedly ungrateful for the privilege of being a girl, if the following conversation had not reached her through the box hedge: —

Lady Marie: His Majesty will be *so* relieved that it is a son. Think, the boy will be Auguste Philippe the Twenty-fourth!

The Duchess: I distinctly remember the grief of both the King and Queen when the Princess turned out to be a girl.

It was then that the Princess Victorine, who had been dandling her doll and gaining great comfort from this distinctly feminine occupation, threw this same doll from her with violence, unconscious of the symbolic character of the act, and digging her little fists into her eyes, burst into weeping so loud that Lady Marie Françoise and Duchess Louise dragged their buckram-stiffened trains away over the grass to escape from their victim's cries.

Presently sobbing became hard work, and the Princess sat still in the sunshine, thinking. Her blue eyes had red rims about them, her yellow hair was dried in wisps

on her forehead, her fat legs hung dejectedly down. She was reaching back farther and farther into her dim little consciousness, trying to remember how she ever came to make that dreadful initial mistake. She had disappointed the Queen, her mother — here the sobs began again, for the Princess loved that royal lady; she had chosen, though she could not remember when, and had chosen wrongly. Then she began to wonder what it was to be this thing that the King and Queen and Lady Marie and the Duchess were so grateful for, a boy. She candidly thought that she was nicer than the two little counts and the archduckling, and she found her riddle hard to read, for no one had ever before suggested to her, much less explained, the disgrace of sex.

Crying was difficult, and thinking was harder still — for the Princess. Presently she jumped down from her bench and trotted away almost joyfully, for a happy thought had struck her. The Princess was the sweetest, most obliging little soul in the world, and helpful withal. A way of escape had suggested itself to her: she would find out what boys were like and be one. The Queen, her mother, should be no longer disappointed in her, nor should any ladies of the court make invidious remarks through box hedges. Whatever happened, she would never again turn out to be a girl. So, in an unfortunate comparison, made by two people who could obviously ill afford to be critics, began the evolution of that unnatural monster, more "fell than hun-

ger, anguish, or the sea," a mannish woman.

At first the Princess Victorine prayed about it. Every night, in her little golden crib, which had the arms of her house — a spotless leopard, *couchant* — embroidered on the blue satin hangings, she shut her eyes and begged to be made into a prince with yellow love-locks and scarlet doublet and pink hose. Would he be Olivero Rinaldo Victor the Twenty-fourth, she wondered? But every morning she wakened with indignation to the fact that she was still a girl. As her faith in miracle weakened, her determination to succeed by her own efforts grew stronger, and she never doubted that she could do it if she tried hard enough. Her face took on an expres-

sion of firmness, "most unfeminine," said Lady Marie, who was her governess.

"Do not run, my dear — it is so masculine," said Lady Marie, often; or "Do not climb trees, your Highness — such rough playing is fit only for boys."

Then the Princess would look at her with non-committal, wide-opened eyes and say nothing. She had a secret, inner knowledge, dating from that moment of revelation in the garden, of the superiority of being a boy, and henceforward nothing could take it from her, not precept, nor example, nor soft insinuation of the beauty and propriety of womanliness. She knew that people were trying to deceive her; she had heard of conspiracies before — but she never let them see that she knew. On

occasions like this she had a way of looking stupid which was nearer cleverness than anything else that she ever did.

Now, there are people for whom one idea, with variations, will last a lifetime, and the Princess Olivera Rinalda Victorine was one of them. As to questions about the whys and wherefores of things, she never asked one in her life, nor answered one. Very systematically she set about her life-work. As his Highness, her baby brother, grew up, she imitated him. Once she was found standing with her sturdy legs apart and her arms akimbo, whistling. Lady Marie and the Queen both wept, and deprived the Princess that day of her bread and jam, but to no effect. She seemed inspired by the energy of the small boy or the

demon. Her legs could not keep still; she ran, she jumped, she leaped, she climbed, she played all boyish games, and once, but my ink blushes red in recording this, she was caught by the Duchess turning somersaults in the garden. Terrible were the reproaches heaped upon her, and her misdeeds seemed greater because they went unexplained. On this occasion Lady Marie and the Duchess were both sent to discipline her. (Lady Marie was attired in rose satin covered with black lace, and the Duchess was charming in Nile-green brocade, with pearls.) When Lady Marie said, with her scented handkerchief at her eyes: "My dear, your actions are bringing me into disrepute; what will their Majesties think of me?" the Princess, who detested scents,

only turned red and said nothing. Not once did she retort that she never would have tried to be a boy if these two had not taught her the desirability of it ; she only trudged on in her own way toward the longed-for goal, sure that the scoldings, the reproaches, and, saddest of all, her mother's tears, came because she had not tried hard enough and had not succeeded.

There were times when the Princess Victorine surpassed Auguste Philippe. One sunshiny morning, when the two were playing knight and ogre in the courtyard, the Prince announced that he meant to climb the castle wall. He did it only out of bravado, for, being a boy, with a boy's common sense, he knew that it was impossible.

"I 'm going to climb it, too," said Olivera Rinalda Victorine stubbornly.

"Pshaw, you can't! You 're only a girl," said Auguste Philippe, strutting up and down in his slashed velvet doublet and his feathered cap.

"And you are only a boy," said the Princess, meditatively eying him. She did not say it to be saucy — she was only thinking. Then she deliberately took the hem of her embroidered blue satin skirt in her teeth and began to climb the wall, while Auguste Philippe watched from below with wrath and terror in his eyes. By means of a niche here, a clinging ivy vine there, a window ledge, and, now and then, a friendly, grinning gargoyle, the Princess succeeded, and stood at last triumphant upon the battle-

ments, waving her blue skirt for a flag. But all that she got for it was a scolding, and, to the day of his death, Auguste Philippe never admitted that it was true. In fact, he never entirely believed it, though he had watched every step from the courtyard below.

Better even than boyish sports, the Princess loved stories of knightly deeds, and the very pith and marrow of chivalry entered into her bones. She could not read, but that did not matter, for the story-tellers could not write, but oh! they could tell tales. Stories of dragons slain and ogres vanquished, stories of maidens rescued, enchanters caught and prisoned, stories of caitiff knights thrust through at the moment of their greatest villainy by the swords

of heroes, all these the Princess Victorine drank up with greedy ears and mind, and her heroic little heart throbbed within her. Often — it was most unmaidenly — she furtively felt of her muscle in leg or arm, wondering when she would be strong enough to go forth in quest, for not one tale roused in her the desire to become a teller of stories herself — she only wanted to act one. Once she took Auguste Philippe aside, saying : —

"I 'll tell you a secret, if you won't tell."

"Go ahead!" said Auguste Philippe graciously. He had doubly the air of a sovereign, being at once a brother and heir presumptive.

"I 'm going out to find and fight a dragon," said Princess Victorine.

"Huh!" sneered the Prince. "There are n't any dragons any more. You are behind the times."

"Are n't any dragons!" cried the Princess. "What do you mean?"

"There have n't been any for a long time," remarked Auguste Philippe nonchalantly, his hands in his pockets. But the Princess would not have the foundations of her faith shaken too easily.

"What do they mean by telling us about them all the time?" she demanded. "Every minstrel that comes here does, and so does old Lord Jean, and the Countess Madeline, and everybody nice."

"I don't care," asserted the Prince. "There are n't any — there 's only the Microbe."

'What's the Microbe?" gasped the Princess.

"It's worse than dragons, that's what it is," said Auguste Philippe viciously.

"What does it do?" asked the Princess.

"It bites," answered the Prince. "It stays somewhere in the woods and swamps, and every year it eats a great number of youths and maidens and old men and children. It's always hungry."

"Why doesn't somebody go and kill it?" said the Princess.

"Dunno!" answered Auguste Philippe.

"What does it look like?"

"It has one great eye," answered the Prince unhesitatingly, knowing that life demanded that he should instruct the feminine mind whether he had information or

not; "it has ten great rows of teeth, and what it does not bite with one set it bites with another. It never roars — that makes it worse than a dragon, for you can't tell when it is coming. And it has a hundred thousand claws reaching everywhere."

The Princess went and sat by a rosebush, wearing her most enigmatical expression. If she was overawed, she was too plucky to show it. Prince Auguste Philippe looked at her, not without remorse. He was aware that he knew nothing of the Microbe save its name, but he decided not to confess — it would only shake a sister's confidence, so he went away to fly his kite.

Now, years flew past, and every day the Princess's bosom swelled with knightly ardor, and every waking thought was of

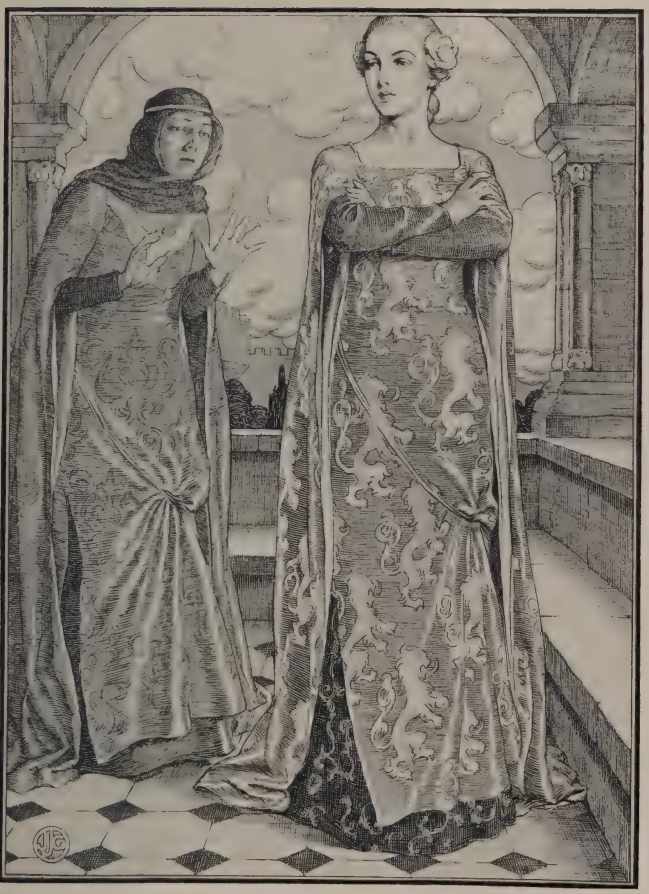
the slaying of the Microbe. The words of Auguste Philippe that day by the rosebush became the second inspiration of her life, and the second only completed and strengthened the first. At eighteen, as at six, the Princess Olivera Rinalda Victorine was round of face and pink of cheek. Her big blue eyes, set in the baby fairness of her face under the yellow hair, had the confiding look of a little child. All this was very pretty, but manly sports had developed her physique far beyond the bounds of feminine propriety. There were muscles on her lovely shoulders, and they made her tiring-women weep. As for her biceps, she had always to wear loose, flowing sleeves, for the strong arms broke through the embroidery of tight ones. She was taller than she

should have been, and her waist refused to taper. If her sex had been different, the royal parents would have gloried in her strength and her agility, but as it was, they cast down their eyes in her presence and begged her, if she had any filial reverence, to talk mincingly and small, at least in their presence.

One day the Princess Olivera Rinalda Victorine sought out Lady Marie.

"I am going on a quest, to find and fight the Microbe," she remarked briefly. Lady Marie gave her one look, and fainted, and the Princess revived her by means of her vinaigrette.

"My dear!" whimpered Lady Marie, "think how many gray hairs you are bringing down in sorrow. I do not mean mine,"



"IT'S GOT TO BE KILLED," SAID THE PRINCESS STURDILY

she added hastily ; and, in truth, hers were no longer gray.

"It's got to be killed," said the Princess sturdily. "It's a pest."

"But what is it ? " whispered Lady Marie, blushing through her rouge. "Is it a thing that a young girl ought to know about ? "

There was hubbub in the court for ten days. Counts, marchionesses, dukes, and earls gathered in corners and talked under their breath. Some thought that the Princess should be imprisoned in a dungeon ; others spoke of her with pity, believing her mad. One party, headed by old Lord Jean and the Countess Madeline, said that it was all nonsense. Everybody knew that there was no such thing as the Microbe; it was

only a new heresy, wickedly devised to shake the established faith in dragons. The Princess might just as well be allowed to go the way of her folly and find out the truth. Another faction, made up of believers, spoke darkly of the mystery that enshrouded the foe, for he lived in a fog, and went out to kill veiled in cloud, and they hinted that if the Princess went to find him, she would not return alive. His Majesty and her Majesty, bewildered, agreed with both parties, wept, protested, but did not forbid the Princess to go, for fear that she would not mind. Auguste Philippe said a bad word.

At first the Princess tried to reason with them — an unwonted occupation for her.

"It really is a combat that a lady could

very well engage in," she said earnestly. "It is n't as if it were a dragon, you know." But they only pooh-poohed and ha-haed until she shut her lips very tightly together, and went on her way as usual, unexplained.

Just here attention was diverted from her, for his Majesty, who had been hurt in hunting, sickened and died, and amid sobs and whisperings and discussions, Auguste Philippe the Twenty-fourth came to the throne. There were many rumors and whispers of how the late King had come to his death: some said that it was a fall from his steed; others hinted the Microbe, shivering with horror at the name. No one was sure of anything, and the court physicians very cleverly gave out that they could not explain at length his Majesty's ailment

because nobody knew enough to understand.

But the Princess Victorine, who was not a person of doubts, was convinced from the first. With her head held very erect, she went to the court armorer, and gave orders that he dared not disobey; then she went to the royal stables and made her choice, while all stood still to watch her, spellbound, no one venturing to lift a hand. Her Majesty was too much overcome with grief to care what happened; Lady Marie and the Duchess were absorbed and happy getting the court into mourning, and so there was no one but Auguste Philippe to say good-by to the Princess when she went away. He had risen very early, and stood upon the battlements to see her go.

It was one brave June day when the Princess Olivera Rinalda Victorine, armed *cap-à-pie*, went forth to war. She was mounted on a charger of dapple gray; a palfrey she would not have. On her head was a shining steel helmet, through the back of which her tawny hair floated down her back — there was not room to do it high. Through her visor her blue eyes sparkled with a steady light. On her arm she carried a blue shield, for even in her battle mood she could not forget what color was becoming. It bore the device that she had chosen for herself, a virgin *rampant*, gules. The armor that covered her from head to foot was of wrought rings of finest steel, made with a flowing skirt that fell in protecting folds about her feet. Her right

hand held a spear; with her left she guided her steed.

"Good-by, dear!" called the Princess, waving her hand to Auguste Philippe.

"You are a silly thing," he remarked, affectionately, from the battlements. "You won't do anything but tear your clothes."

He did not try to stop her. In the strain of becoming Auguste Philippe the Twenty-fourth he found that there were many things he was not so sure of as he had been before. The flame in his sister's eyes he did not understand, and he wondered why she was not content to stay at home and play at quoits and dance to music, as he was; but he resolved that Victorine should make a fool of herself in her own way, and that it should not cost her too dear. So he stood

long watching her as she went shining across the great green plain with the light flashing from a thousand glittering points on her armor.

Now, the Princess rode by night and day, and not once did her courage fail or her arm grow weary. She left behind the green plain and the pleasant trees, and traveled in a grievous waste beyond the songs of birds, and anon she came to a woodland that was dark and old. She was sorely puzzled as to the habitat of the Microbe, for in his raids he came from east and west and north and south, and no one could tell if he had a permanent abiding-place. Often in the dusky shadows of the wood, she stopped to call a challenge: "What, ho! Come out and try thy skill!" But that was not his way of

fighting, and he stayed hidden. Sometimes she inquired at a cottage door or at a shepherd's hut on the edge of the wood, but all thought that the lovely lady in armor was surely mad, wearing such strange clothing and asking such strange questions. Once she came upon a witch-wife who was gathering simples by a swamp in the wood.

"Is the pretty lady looking for the pretty knight that passed this way yestere'en?" asked the witch-wife, with a horrible leer of her sunken eyes.

The Princess elevated her eyebrows with a look of scorn.

"No," she answered coldly; "I am looking for the Microbe."

"How?" asked the witch-woman, with her hand behind her ear.

"The Microbe!" shouted the Princess.

"Is it a man, or a lady, or a place?"

"It's a monster!" shrieked the Princess. "It kills, and eats, and destroys." And then followed a faithful repetition of Auguste Philippe's description of the beast. The witch-wife laughed and rocked to and fro, her yellow teeth showing in her shrunken gums.

"Oh, deary, deary, deary!" she said, "there ain't any such critter, truly there ain't. I 've lived here in the swamp seventy-nine year; I never saw one, and I sees pretty nigh everything."

"Who eats the youths and the maidens, and the old men and the children?" demanded the Princess sternly.

"How do I know? How do I know?" cackled the old woman. "*I* don't."

The Princess Victorine rode away, and behind her the witch-wife laughed.

"That 's the way the pretty knight went," she called. "You 'll find him further on."

The Princess indignantly turned her charger and rode in the opposite direction. That morning came her moment of great reward, for, by the side of a noxious swamp, a gray mist met her, blinding her eyes, and she thought she heard sounds of gurgling and lashing and clawing. Once she caught sight of the great shining eye of which Auguste Philippe had told her, and then she dimly detected the grin of teeth. Olivera Rinalda Victorine was sure that she had met the Microbe at last. With lifted spear, and with the shout, "A maiden to the rescue!" she rode into the floating cloud

and thrust it through and through. Her spear crashed on — something; her charger seemed to trample a living creature under foot, and snorted with terror. Thrice came swift blows upon the Princess's shield, but whether they were of claws or tail, she could not tell. Her ears were deafened by the noise; her armor ripped in the gathers at the waist; her good steed for a moment lost his footing in the morass, but she reined him up, and, mad with the thrill of victory, struck out again and again with more than woman's strength. Then, was it fancy, or did she hear a roar as of mortal pain? Did she catch the sound of swift retreat of a hundred thousand wounded legs?

At home, upon the battlements, that morning, stood Auguste Philippe with some

ladies of the court. (Lady Marie was lovely in deepest crêpe, and the Duchess was looking her best in heavy mourning.)

"It was in that direction that she went, did you say?" sobbed the Duchess, with a black-bordered handkerchief at her eyes.

The young king nodded.

"How can I bear it?" asked Lady Marie, raising her clasped hands to heaven. "Oh, your Highness, send out a searching party! Send fifty armed knights! Think what may happen at any moment!"

"Pshaw!" said Auguste Philippe the Twenty-fourth, "Victorine can take care of herself. She is four inches taller than I, and her arms are like iron. Let her be. She is foolish, but she has got to have her fling."

"In my day," said Lady Marie, "no modest girl would have suggested such a thing."

"I dare say," sighed his Majesty; "but the thing has got to come; they must sow their wild oats! She will come back all right."

Though Lady Marie did not know it, his Majesty Auguste Philippe then, as always, spoke the truth.

At that very moment, beyond the wide green plain, and beyond the sandy waste, a young knight, riding slowly, with his head bent down upon his breast, came upon a maiden sitting at the edge of a wood. Near her, cropping the grass, strayed a gray charger, with his bridle falling loose upon his neck. The maiden was curiously clad

in shining armor, only her helmet was off, and tears were trickling down her cheeks. Now and then she dried them with strands of her yellow hair, and then she shuddered, gazing at a bloody spear that she held in her left hand.

"Fair lady," said the Knight, riding toward her, "tell me your trouble, that I may help you."

The Princess Olivera Rinalda Victorine looked up at him and sobbed, and her chain armor rose and fell upon her bosom. She had not cried this way since that memorable day on the stone bench in the garden, twelve years ago.

"I've — I've killed the Microbe!" gasped Princess Victorine.

"Indeed?" said the Knight, raising his

visor and showing a pleasant smile upon a pale face. "And are you not glad?"

"Ye-es!" said the Princess, with a great heave of her bosom as she looked at the disfigured spear.

The stranger alighted from his horse and came slowly toward the Princess. He was tall and strongly built, but he walked as one to whom every motion brings pain.

"Are you quite sure that the beast is dead?"

The Princess nodded.

"Quite."

"I wonder," said the Knight meditatively, "if you brought away his head or a claw?"

"No, I did n't; but I feel very sure. Men are so skeptical!" said the Princess, with some heat.

"Not at all," answered the Knight courteously, "only your quest is the same as mine, and I should be glad to know that it is over. I, too, am hunting him."

A beautiful expression swept over the Princess's face and into her blue eyes. She looked less like a baby than she had done at any time for seventeen years.

"I thought men did n't care."

"Some do."

"Auguste Philippe does n't — he only laughs, and so does old Lord Jean; but I think that this will convince them," and Princess Victorine triumphantly brandished her spear.

"Ah!" said the Knight, looking at it with sudden interest, "may I see your point?" But as he moved to take it, he

gave a sudden groan and fainted at the Princess's feet.

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Olivera Rinalda Victorine. In a trice she unlaced the Knight's helmet and corselet, and was horrified to find blood flowing from an open wound in his shoulder. Hastily she brought water in her helmet from a spring hard by, and bathed his forehead and eyes, and then ran for more to pour on the wound, saying, as she went, something unpleasant about her skirt of chain armor, which kept getting in her way. As she worked, the eyelids fluttered, and the dark eyes slowly opened.

"Are you hurt?" asked the Princess eagerly.

"I'm afraid that I am rather badly cut up," he answered, with a groan.

"Did that — Beast do it?" asked the Princess.

"It may be," said the Knight.

The Princess rose and put on her helmet.

"Where are you going?" asked the Knight.

"After It," said Victorine sternly.

"Lovely lady," he said feebly, "don't you think you ought to wait until I am better?"

"I'm not a lovely lady, I'm a warrior," said the Princess; "but of course I'll stay if you want me to."

"You are both," said the Knight. "Do you know I think that it would make me forget my pain if you should tell me of your fight."

So the Princess, with a shining face, told

him of her battle in the mist, and of the monster with the great, glowing eye, and as she talked, she failed to see that the wounded man kept looking toward the spot where his gleaming helmet lay.

"And now," said the Princess reproachfully, with red flushing her cheeks, "tell me how you were wounded. Do you mind explaining how you came to be hurt in the back?"

"Somebody or something attacked me from behind," said the Knight, with a smile half hiding the look of pain on his face.

"The coward!" cried the Princess Victorine, in great anger.

"It may have been some one who did not know the rules of the game," said the Knight.

"That makes *no* difference," said Princess Victorine loftily.

"Well, it was a strange combat," remarked the Knight, "and the blows were the oddest I ever received. They came thrashing from all sides, in defiance of all the laws of fighting. Whether they came from man or beast I could not see — you know yourself that it is foggy in the woods, and I was disabled by the blow in the back."

"I know," nodded the Princess sympathetically. "You 've been fighting that same monster that I killed." And for the life of her, she could not help a little feeling of triumph that the beast had gone down before her rather than before him.

"When did you kill him ?" asked the wounded man.

"This morning," beamed the Princess. "When were you hurt?"

"Oh, I believe it was this morning," said the Knight carelessly.

"I wish, for your sake, I had done it sooner," said Victorine regretfully. One of her greatest charms was her slowness in putting two and two together. Now she had little time for it, for the Knight fainted again. For the first time in her life, the Princess repented of her aversion to smelling-salts. However, there was plenty of water in the spring, and she kept her best lawn handkerchief, which she had carried up her sleeve, wet upon the sick man's brow. Through the fever of that day she watched him, and all night, and again a second one, and on the third day there was

a look of weariness upon her face that had never been there before. As the fever abated, and the Knight was aware of the tender nursing that he was receiving, he watched the Princess with eyes full of gratitude. She had laid aside her armor, and was becomingly attired in blue brocade, which she had worn underneath the steel. The sun shone pleasantly on her yellow hair, and if the color in her cheeks was less pink than it had been, it meant, with the dark shadows under her eyes, only new beauty. When he spoke his thanks, she turned red as a boy would have done, and asked him please to stop, which he did.

That afternoon the Princess grew confidential. She was sitting near the invalid,

who was propped up on a mossy pillow, supported from underneath by her armor and her shield.

"Just feel my muscle!" said the Princess impulsively.

"I have!" said the sick Knight gravely.

"Why, when?" demanded the Princess. "Oh, you mean when I lifted your head. But look how it stands out."

He did so.

"You see," said Olivera Rinalda Victorine, "I am so unfeminine. I ought to have been a boy."

"Never!" cried the Knight vehemently.

The Princess looked at him in surprise.

"I'm very sure," she said gently. "I've known it ever since I was so high," and she measured off the stature of six years

by holding her white hand above the ground.

"I don't agree with you," said the Knight. "You're not in the least like a boy, really. You do not look like one, nor use your arms like one."

"When have you noticed that?" asked the Princess, in surprise.

"Oh, lots of times," he answered evasively. "But tell me why you think so."

Sitting beside him, with the beech leaves making a flickering shade on her face and throat, the Princess told him all the tragedy of her life, her discovery of her initial great mistake, her unavailing efforts to set it right, and the persecutions she had suffered because she was not ladylike. It was the first confidence that she had made in all

her life, and her cheeks flushed deep red. Overhead sang thrush and sparrow, and a little breeze came and played with her floating hair. Suddenly the Knight reached out and took the white hand in his and kissed it.

"Why did you do that?" asked the Princess softly. "To comfort me for not being a boy?"

"No," growled the sick man.

"Then why?" she persisted, drawing it away.

"Oh, I can't tell you," he groaned, "until I know whether I shall get well of this beastly wound."

But the Princess, taking both hands to arrange the wet handkerchief, suddenly found them prisoned and covered with kisses.

"It is because I love you," he moaned. "Don't you understand?"

Princess Victorine eyed him with curiosity, and shook her head.

"No," she answered, kneeling down and looking at him, "I 'm afraid I don't. Nobody ever did before."

The Knight laughed out from the mossy green pillow.

"That 's just what makes you so adorable."

"Won't you try to make me understand?" said the Princess. "I am very slow, but when I once learn, I never forget."

"Victorine," said the Knight, fixing his dark eyes on her, "I love you, and I need you. I love your hair and your eyes and the touch of your hands, and I want you to

be my queen. You are a princess, I know, but then I am a prince."

Olivera Rinalda Victorine was silent a long time, kneeling on the moss.

"Are you angry?" asked the Knight, at length.

"No," said the Princess, in a whisper. "I think I like it." Then he smiled up at her, but did not even touch her hand.

"Tell me truly," said the Princess, "don't you mind my climbing trees and doing all those things?"

"Not a bit."

"Nor the device on my shield?"

He laughed and shook his head.

"Nor my wanting to go on a quest, and do all those unfeminine things?"

"Victorine," said the Knight, "it is the

brave soul of you that I love. We will go on and fight together."

Then there was a sudden shining that was neither from the sun nor the Princess's hair, but from the light that sprang into her face, and when the wounded man lifted his arms and drew her toward him, she bent and kissed him on the eyes, and no one ever knew, she least of all, where she had learned that.

Three days more and three nights they stayed there, and the sick man's strength came slowly back. In the quiet they talked of many things in the past and many yet to come. Only once in all that time did Princess Victorine looked troubled.

"Dear," she said one day, "there are moments when I am afraid that you do not

quite believe in me. I am not sure that you are convinced that I have really killed the Microbe."

"Beloved," said the Knight, putting down a piece of his armor, where he had been idly fitting the point of the Princess's spear into a great hole, "I believe in you utterly, only, there may be more than one, you know, and so our quest is not over."

On the fourth day they put their armor on, caught their steeds, and rode away. On the Princess's shield the maiden stood out bravely against the blue; the stranger Knight carried the device of an ugly worm transfixed by a glittering sword, and the motto was "I search." The maiden knight and the man looked at each other from under their visors.

"To the death!" he cried, and he spurred his steed.

"To the death!" echoed the Princess, dashing after him, and so they rode gallantly away. Whether they have found and fought the Microbe none can say, but this is known, that they are happy in the quest.

THE SEVEN STUDIOUS SISTERS

THE SEVEN STUDIOUS SISTERS

His Majesty the King was in a terrible state of mind. Leaning back, speechless, upon his throne, with his crown over one ear, his fists clenched, he strove in vain to speak, but only an inarticulate gurgling made its way from the royal throat. Behind him stood his Jester, merry in cap and bells; on the right, the court philosophers, with puckered brows and sagely folded arms; and all about knights-at-arms and ladies-in-waiting silent and dismayed.

Before the King, on the lowest step of the throne, almost under the gold-brocaded canopy, knelt, with clasped hands and beseeching eyes, Sylvie, Natalie, Amelie, Virginie, Sidonie, Dorothée, and Clementine, the seven beautiful daughters of old Count Benoît of Verdennes, all badly frightened, but intrepid.

"Speak!" thundered the King at last. "No, do not speak! Every word will be used against you!"

"Your Majesty," began Sylvie, who was the eldest and had black hair, "we came to beg," —

"With great earnestness," continued Natalie, who had brown hair, —

"That you will give us the opportunity," said golden-haired Amelie, shivering, —

"To study," said Virginie, who had brown eyes, —

"And grow wise," said Sidonie, whose eyes were blue, —

"And so we ask," said Dorothée, who had gray eyes, —

"That we may enter the university," said little Clementine, who had dimples.

It was sad for the youngest to say the hardest part of all, yet perhaps it was only fair, as it was the strong will of Clementine that had led them there, and the courage of Clementine that had kept them from faltering by the way.

They were simply repeating what they had just said; the parts had been arranged before coming, in hope that his Majesty could not resist. Never in their worst fore-

bodings, when they had talked it over as they braided one another's hair in the tiring-room of the castle, had they dreamed of anything so terrible as this.

"Wh-what put this idea into your heads?" thundered his Majesty.

Then the seven answered as one maiden: "The Princess Pourquoi."

The King groaned aloud, and the knights-at-arms and the ladies-in-waiting groaned with him. Was it not enough for him to have had a daughter whose useless thinking had embittered his reign? She, with her quick intellect and ready questions, had made his throne totter under him; and now, when she was safely married and away—ay, and had made as good a match as the dullest maid in Christendom, must

the spirit of inquiry come back to him in seven shapes? Since she was gone, all had been peace; he had been able to sleep most of the other half of the day also. His Majesty fidgeted under his purple robe. The Church had taught him that it was right for the sins of the fathers to be visited upon the children, but nothing about the sins of the children being visited upon the fathers, and he could not understand.

Sylvie, Natalie, Amalie, Virginie, Sidonie, Dorothée, and little Clementine looked at him with begging eyes. Now brown eyes and blue eyes and gray eyes and black hair and brown hair and golden hair and dimples all appealed strongly to the King, and he was surprised at himself for a

moment for not being able to act as ugly as he thought he felt.

"What do you want to study for?" he demanded, his hands slowly unclenching.

"I don't know," faltered little Clementine, blushing into her dimples. Somewhere there was a faint ripple of laughter, and yet the Jester's face was perfectly sober when he lifted his head.

"To be wise and know things," said Sidonie. The King stamped.

"To be a power," said Natalie.

"Pshaw!" said the King.

"To understand all things," said Virginie. The King groaned.

"So that people will like us," said Amelie. Then came again that echo of mocking

laughter, and the Jester muttered from behind the throne: —

"Now are there some here that are greater fools than I; for the whole world knows that a woman is better beloved for what she understands not than for what she understands."

The King looked desperately about him, for he was at his wits' end, but none came to his aid. The philosophers, with their eyes cast down, were stroking their beards; the ladies-in-waiting were looking away, as delicacy demanded, after so shocking a request; the knights-at-arms were frankly gazing at blue eyes or brown, as taste suggested. Then the King spoke hoarsely: —

"This is treason. The lowest dungeon in my castle is not too hard a punishment

for such offense. At any cost this spirit must be quenched — at any cost."

Tears flowed softly down the cheeks of the seven maidens, and fell on their clasped hands, and the drops from Virginie's brown eyes sparkled like jewels on Amelie's golden hair. Then, in the sorrowful pause, the King's Jester stepped softly forward, and the little bells upon his patches rang as he came.

"Sire," said he, "I could tell a remedy more potent than this and less savage."

"Speak, Fool!" said the King.

"Not afore folks," answered the Jester, with a smile.

"They understand not your folly," said the King.

"Ay, but they might, for none can tell

when words of wisdom may begin to penetrate dull brains. Clear me the room of these philosophers and the others, and let the maidens begone, for I cannot abide a woman's tears."

"Go!" said his Majesty.

Then the weeping maidens and the ladies-in-waiting passed out in a shimmer of gold color, and crimson, and blue, and rich green; and after them, like a shadow, crept the philosophers in garments of black; and then, with a clash of steel and flashing of wrought armor, went the knights-at-arms, and the presence chamber was empty, save for the King on the throne and the Jester, who stood before him in the posture of the philosophers, with folded arms and head bent low.

"Sire," said the Fool, "when women grow wise" —

"The kingdom is lost," said his Majesty. "Little enough comfort is there now."

"They will outstrip their brothers," said the Jester.

"They will meddle with matters of state," said the King.

"They will see through us all," continued the Fool. "For my part, I would keep them the sweet, blind creatures that they are. 'T is enough for me that I see through myself. Now there is one way, and one only, to check the growing intellect of women."

"And what may that be?" asked the King, the sadness lifting from his face.

"Forsooth, they must have a university of their own," answered the Jester.

"WHAT!" THUNDERED HIS MAJESTY

"What!" thundered his Majesty.

"Ay!" said the Fool, nodding; "there is no other way. The Princess Pourquoi has lighted in this land a fire that can be put out in only one fashion. Let a foundation be made; let walls arise; let lecturers come. Naught save a university curriculum will avail now to dull the wits and divert the minds and check the thought of women."

"In truth you have a pretty wit," said the King, and he smiled. "But who will take charge of this undertaking and plan me the work that it may avail?"

"I," said the Jester. "Who else? Cap and gown would become me well, and though the King may lose his fool, he will gain My Lord Rector, who will speak bravely in the Latin tongue."

"And whom can we trust to aid in the work?" asked his Majesty.

"Lend me but the philosophers," said the Jester, with a wink, "and their natural parts shall prevail where intent might come badly off in this great task of dulling women's wits."

Then the two spoke long between themselves, and when they had finished, the Jester went and called the pages, and the great doors were thrown open, so that all entered as they had gone, and there was shimmer of silk and shining of jewels and gleaming of armor. The seven maidens came trembling in every limb, not knowing but their heads should fall, and they knelt as before at the foot of the throne, only now they had nothing to say. Then the King

lifted up his voice and, smiling, said that it should be even as they had desired, and that learning and wisdom should be theirs. In one thing only should change be made: they should not mingle with the herd of men, but should have, sequestered and apart, a place of learning for womankind. When they heard this, Sylvie leaned her face upon the head of Natalie and wept for joy; and Natalie hers upon the head of Amelie, and Amelie upon Virginie, and Virginie upon Sidonie, and Sidonie upon Dorothée, and Dorothée upon little Clementine, and because Clementine had nowhere to lean her head, she wept into her own dimples.

Then the King's Fool went away and did not come again, and of this there was great

talk for three days, and then all was forgotten, for another jester filled his place. One day appeared at court a grave gentleman clad all in flowing black, bearded, and with eyes cast down in a sort of inward look. All called him My Lord Rector, and none knew him for the King's Jester because he had changed his cap. He spoke but little, and that in Latin, as "*Verbum sat sapienti; depressus extollor; veni, vidi, vici;*" and if he made gibe or jest, there were none who could understand.

There was upon the outskirts of the city a great building that had once been the Palace of Justice, but was no longer used because a loftier one had been erected in the square where the minster rose. This stood not far from the river-bank, and was

all of gray stone that had crumbled somewhat, so that the tracery of leaf and flower in the Gothic windows and the faces and claws of the gargoyles that peered from roof and corner were in many places worn away. It was built on three sides of a great court, where now grass and vine and flower grew unchecked, on the spot once worn by the feet of gathering citizens and the tramp of steeds. Bluebird and swallow and wren had entered through the broken windows, and had built about the window niches and in the crannies of the carven vine. This, said the King, should be the place of learning consecrated to the maidens, for it was not meet that they should gather in the market square or on the hill beyond the minster, as young men did in those days when thou-

sands came together to listen to philosophical disputes, and no roof was sufficient to cover them. Workmen came and mended broken arch and column, and cleared away the tangled vines of the court, but left growing grass and flower, and did not touch the nesting birds, for the seven lovely sisters begged that they might stay. Hither flocked innumerable damsels, who came riding from all parts of the kingdom, with squires before them and waiting-maids behind. They came on black jennet and white palfrey and pony of dapple gray; maiden madness had run throughout the kingdom, and all who could sit on saddle or hold rein rushed hither for their share of the new learning. Many were pursued by father or brother, by maiden aunt or widowed mother, beg-

CAME RIDING FROM ALL PARTS OF THE KINGDOM

ging them to abide at home in safety as modest maidens should.

It was noised abroad that the Lord Rector would deliver the first lecture when the new work began, and all were eager to hear; so it came to pass one day that a huge company passed in procession under the carven Gothic gate and into the great hall whose stained windows looked one way on the river and the other way on the court. First, in gown of velvet and of silk, came My Lord Rector, muttering in his beard; after him followed the philosophers, with stately step and slow; and then young squires a-many, who were eager to see what would befall; and lords and ladies in ġay clothing, rarely embroidered in choice colors. There were maiden students also, many score, and

at their head Sylvie, in scarlet silken gown, and Natalie in green; Amelie in brown velvet, curiously slashed, and Virginie in yellow; Sidonie in blue samite, and Dorothée in silver, and little Clementine in white, as befitted her tender years. Now behold! within the great hall the King was already waiting in a chair of state under a velvet canopy, and My Lord Rector and the philosophers of the new faculty bowed low to him as they entered. Then the Rector mounted upon a platform, and bowing to the King with "*Rex augustissimus*," he winked in his old fashion and fell a-coughing, and the King winked back and then fell a-sneezing, to hide the smile that his beard only half concealed.

"*Viri illustrissimi*," continued the Rec-

tor, bowing again before his audience and speaking in a solemn voice: "*mutatis mutandis, horresco referens, da locum melioribus, dux femina facti, humanum est errare, nil nisi cruce, graviora manent, post nubila Phoebus, sunt lachrimae rerum, vae victis.*"

The last words came with a quiver of the voice, and many wept, for they did not understand his folly. Then My Lord Rector turned to the fair body of women students and spoke, seeing only the face of little Clementine: —

"*Feminae praeclarissimae, credo quia impossibile est, inest Clementia forti, crede quod habes et habeo, sic itur ad astra, toga virilis, vita sine literis mors est, varium et mutabile semper femina, vade*

in pace," and with this there was hardly a dry eye in the house. So the new university was opened.

Needless to say, the success of the undertaking was great. Throughout the land, bower and hall and dell were left empty, for the maidens had all gone to the capital to get learning. They no longer wrought fair figures in the embroidery frames in the great halls of their ancestral castles, or polished the armor of father and brother, or brewed cordials for the sick over the glowing coals. They no longer wandered in gowns of green on their palfreys by hill or dale for the joy of going. By hundreds they bowed their fair heads before the philosophers as they lectured, taking notes upon the tablets of their minds, for they

did not know how to write. My Lord Rector, when he spoke, could find no room large enough to contain his audiences, so he lectured only on sunshiny days, and stood on a platform in the centre of the great court ; and words of grave nonsense fell from his lips as the light fell on golden hair or brown. So intently did the maidens listen that they did not smell the fragrance of the flowers crushed beneath their feet, wild rose and lily and violet, nor did they hear the beat of the wings of startled birds, nor see red crest, or golden wing, or blue, flash across the sky.

Being a cunning man and keen, My Lord Rector had left to the flocking students the choice of the lectures that they should pursue.

"Let them but manage it themselves," he said, smiling wickedly, at a private audience with the King, "and we shall see great things."

So the maidens met in assembly and consulted gravely together, and conferred with Rector and with faculty, and presently many branches of learning were established and all was going with great vigor. Each student chose for herself what course she should pursue, and it was pretty to see how maiden whims worked out into hard endeavor. Black-haired Sylvie specialized in dramatics, for she made, with her sweeping locks, an excellent tragedy queen; Natalie in athletics, and she took the standing high-jump better than any knight in Christendom; golden-haired Amelie devoted all her

time to fiddling and giglology, and soon became proficient; Virginie, of the brown eyes, took ping-pong and fudge; blue-eyed Sidonie, acrostics and charades; Dorothée took chattering and cheering, and soon her sweet voice could be heard above the noise of building, or the roar of battle; while little Clementine worked at all branches of frivology, and became a great favorite, for in looks and in manner and in taste she represented that which is most pleasing in woman.

To tell of all they did and learned and thought would be too long a tale, and, moreover, the records of much of it have perished, but men say that their life was both strenuous and merry, and that womankind blossomed out into new beauty of face

and form and mind. The infinite range of opportunity has been but faintly shadowed forth in the hints already given; and to those who philosophized and those who poetized, those who took societies and those who took cuts, life was one long burst of irrelevant, joyous activity. Most zealous of all the students was little Clementine. Ceaselessly alert, she listened with upturned face to lectures in the great flower-grown court; with infantile audacity she ventured out into vast unknown realms of thought, and puckered her white forehead in trying to work out the unutterable syllable. Now she walked the cloisters where the shadow of carven leaf and tendril fell on her hair, studying a parchment; and again, in moments of relaxation, she rode

her dog-eared pony fast and furiously. To some this animal may seem strange, but there were many queer creatures in those days, as Sir John Maundeville tells.

It came to pass, no one knows how, that nothing done by little Clementine escaped the notice of My Lord Rector, for his eyes followed her always. When he lectured, he lectured to Clementine ; whether he said words of Latin or of the vulgar tongue, he spoke them to her eyes ; and he was ashamed of the learned nonsense he was speaking when he gazed on Clementine. Sleeping, he saw her walking so-and-so under the shadow of Gothic arch with leaf shadows on her face, and he dreamed of taking the parchment from her white fingers and — But here he always woke, though he tried

to dream farther. Clearly, something had happened to him that neither his experience as Sir Fool nor as Lord Rector had prepared him to understand.

Save for this haunting thought, he was very gay behind a solemn face. Dearly he loved his task, and none but the King and himself heard the faint tinkle of bells from under his scholar's cap. Always they greeted each other with Latin words, and they had many conferences wherein they chuckled together over the success of their plan, for they knew that they had drawn all these women forth to follow after the very shadow of learning, and that the end would leave them more ignorant than before. Always, however, in these moments of mirth, like a stab at the heart came to

the Lord Rector the thought of deception practiced upon Clementine. Her trusting eyes, lifted to him in uttermost faith, reproached him by night and by day. If, by force, he put his conscience from him, he was sure to see her face as she listened, hiding in the recesses of her heart the silly words he said. Once, as she went alone toward the lodgings, and he followed at a great distance, a foot-pad set upon her in a dark corner, where a stone stairway gave shelter to thieves, and My Lord Rector, rushing forward, struck lustily about him right and left and felled the knave, taking from him the lady's netted purse and giving it back to her. She said no word save one of thanks, but after, when her eyes were raised, he saw that a new

light had been added to the old, and that little Clementine reverenced him not only as a learned man, but as a brave one, too.

So weeks drifted by, and months, and then came a great event, for the maidens had determined to carry out a custom that belonged to that olden time and formed the final test of the scholar. All agreed that Clementine, brave, childish, perverse little Clementine, should initiate the new audacity. Therefore, one early morning, when the first rays of the sun were just peeping over the high stone city wall, she might have been observed stealing in academic garb of black over her white dress to the great oak, iron-studded door of the old Palace of Justice. Here, with a stone,

she hammered a long parchment, and she established herself hard by, so that all who saw her knew that she was there to defend against all comers the theses she had nailed up. Now there were eight, and they ran as follows: —

1. That the ineffable and the intangible are not the same.

2. That all that is not, is, and all that seems to be, is not.

3. That — but it would be foolish to transcribe all the theses that little Clementine defended, for no one would understand. Suffice it to say that they were subtle beyond the mind of man, and clothed in words drawn from the deep abyss of the inane, where unborn thought goes ever crying for birth. One by one her six sisters came

against her and argued, but to no avail, for little Clementine, no less skillful than David of yore, gathered together verb and adjective and slung them so unerringly that antagonist after antagonist went down, and she, often snubbed as being but the youngest, stood forth in the eyes of the admiring crowd a victor.

The picture that she made, standing against that gray stone wall flecked with green moss, with a grinning gargoyle leaning down toward her, was very sweet. In little Clementine the brown hair and the golden hair, the brown eyes and the gray eyes, of the family met in a peculiarly bewitching combination that had a chameleon quality of color constantly changing. Moreover, as she argued in well-chosen

words, she was unconsciously establishing the unspoken thesis: —

That four dimples may exist at the same time in a maiden's face without seeming too many.

This My Lord Rector saw, and something gave way within him. When the argument was over and the audience was departing, he called Clementine to him inside the gate as one who would ask something, and then stood speechless. The maiden, who was flushed and weary, lifted her scholar's cap, and he saw, in the locks of hair that were neither brown nor gold, pearls woven; and above the collar of the gown showed the embroidered white samite of her dress.

"Little Clementine," said My Lord Rec-

tor, "your student life is almost done. Does that fact cause rejoicing?"

"Nay," said Clementine, casting down her eyes.

"Shall you grieve for anything left behind?"

"Ay," said the maiden.

"And what?" asked My Lord Rector.

"The learned lectures, the dissertations, the wise words," said Clementine, looking up and dimpling.

"And any special ones?" asked he, wondering if she heard about him the jingle of bells.

"Ay," said Clementine, smoothing her gown with slim white fingers and setting her lips together. Not another word would she say, though the great man begged humbly.

"Clementine," asked My Lord Rector, changing the subject, "shall you ever wed?"

"If the right man comes," said the maiden.

"And what must he be?"

"He must be very wise."

"Am I wise, little one?" asked the Rector.

"Wisest of all," answered the maiden, whispering.

Then he took her white hand in his and said softly, "*Amo. Amas?*" but Clementine did not understand a word of Latin. Looking up, however, she saw something she did understand, and then My Lord Rector bent and kissed her hand, wisely using the old, old way of wooing that was

found before words, Latin or other, were invented.

Then Clementine drew back trembling and looked, and behold, he who had been but a wonderful voice was changed, and she saw that he was a man, and young, and comely, with merry eyes touched with sadness, and a mouth whose curves were both cynical and sweet.

"Why, why should you choose me?" asked the maiden, in a voice that shook for reverence.

"Because you are so adorably foolish!" cried the lover, forgetting, and that was a mistaken speech, which mere words could not explain away.

It was agreed between them that none should know what had befallen until the

day when old Count Benoît and his Lady Myriel came up to the city to take home their seven daughters, for their work was counted done. So the two lived a glad life, though they spoke but seldom; often a glance of the eyes made food for both day and night. All the time My Lord Rector's conscience pricked him more and more, until he could no longer bear it, and one day, coming upon Clementine where she passed the path by the rippling river, near three willow trees that were freshly leaved out, for it was spring, he told her the tale of how he and the King had deceived womankind, and, with torture of spirit, confessed himself the King's Fool. Then Clementine looked up at him with eyes where the gray and the brown seemed flecked with green,

perchance from the shadow of the willows, and said firmly: —

"I have always seen that they who call themselves fools are the least so," nor could he ever after by any words of confession shake her steadfast faith in his wisdom.

At last came the day when Count Benoît arrived, and with him cousins and other kin from far and near, for all would know something of the strange new ways in the city. At lecture hour all crowded together in the great hall, and again the King was there upon the dais, solemn of look, but merry of heart, for his eyes twinkled under his heavy eyebrows as he looked at the fair, fresh faces before him, innocent of thought as any other maidens' faces, and he chuckled to think how he and his dear Fool

had outwitted them all. Then he looked with affection at his trusty philosophers who stood near in silk robes with slashes of velvet and hoods of rainbow colors, and he thanked heaven that had given him strong supporters in the crisis that had threatened his kingdom. Gazing upon the assembled audience of friends and kinsfolk, he rejoiced to think that for them, as for him, the country had been saved.

But My Lord Rector was speaking in the Latin tongue, "*ad hoc gradum admitto* . . . ," and Sylvie, Natalie, Amelie, Virginie, Sidonie, Dorothée, and little Clementine, with all the other maidens who had frolicked with them merrily so long a time, arose, as pretty a sight to see as ever king in Christendom had before

him, and their new honors fell upon untroubled white foreheads. Then there was sound of rejoicing, and light shone through the stained windows on the glad faces and gay garments of the people assembled there; and suddenly, lo! My Lord Rector stepped from his high place and went to take the hand of little Clementine. With eyes cast down she followed him, and now she was rosy and now pale, and so the two kneeled at the feet of the king under the canopy.

"We two do crave your Majesty's blessing," said My Lord Rector, "on our betrothal."

Then a ripple of wonder and of laughter ran through the great hall, and his Majesty, smiling, blessed them with extended hands,

and as they rose, he bent forward with a twinkle, whispering: —

"You have done well, My Lord Rector, in carrying out your purpose. It is pity that you may not marry them all."

For the first time he found no answering jest in his favorite's eyes, and would have inquired why, but the philosopher who stood nearest, and had caught the whisper, smiled, and taking Sylvie's hand, led her to the foot of the throne, saying: —

"But I, your Majesty, may wed this lady with the King's consent, for she has given hers." Then a second philosopher led forth Natalie, and a third Amelie, and a fourth Virginie, and a fifth Sidonie, and a sixth Dorothée, and behold! the seven sisters were again kneeling before the

throne awaiting the King's blessing, but with their lovers at their sides.

Then his Majesty leaned back his head and roared with laughter till the vaulted ceiling reëchoed, and tears of mirth ran down his cheeks and shone upon his beard, and all laughed with him, though they knew not why, all save My Lord Rector, whose face wore the saddest look a man may wear.

"Now, was this planned among you?" asked his Majesty.

Then they shook their heads, and each philosopher said: —

"Forsooth, I thought I was the only one," and with that the King roared again.

In the bustle that followed, when old Count Benoît and his Lady Myriel hung

upon the necks of their seven daughters in turn, the King tapped the Lord Rector upon the arm.

"You have builded even better than the promise said," whispered his Majesty. "From this blow shall the aggressive intellect of woman not arise."

But the Rector looked gloomily upon him and knelt again, and begged that his Majesty would release him from further service that he might go to the wars.

"Two parts of the Fool have I played for your Majesty," said the man bitterly, "and from both I would be released, for you and I have done a great wrong."

Little Clementine had drawn nearer, and many-colored light of purple and crimson and gold fell on her fair face and parted

lips as she looked in wonder at her lover. Then the King saw and understood, and he was ashamed.

"Nay, My Lord Rector," he said, bending low, "what we have done of wrong we will right. You shall even go on with the task set before you, and that that you do lack of a wise man shall this woman's faith make good."

THE GENTLE ROBBER

THE GENTLE ROBBER

ONCE there was a robber bold — not that he looked bold, for he had the gentlest of manners and the most persuasive tongue. It was with a certain manly shyness that he approached his victims, and his voice was very low and soft as he convinced them how greatly to their interest it would be to hand over their purses, so that many went on through the green forest paths with empty pockets, it is true, but with eyes full of tears of gratitude for the benefactor who had held them up.

"Pray don't mention it!" said the Robber Chief, as he deprecatingly thrust into his wallet the purses he had taken and heard the outpoured thanks. "It is nothing, nothing! You would have done as much for me at any time if you had" — he never finished his sentence, but the wistful admiration of the man with empty pockets always added the right clause — "if you had had the brains."

Now the Gentle Robber, it need hardly be said, was highly successful in his chosen calling, or, as he put it, "the holy saints had given him rich possessions." He had started out moderately in a remote corner of the forest, as became a young and unassuming retail cut-purse, but soon his domain extended from his own retired dell

to the adjacent glade, and the merry outlaw who had prospered there gave up the business and became a scrivener's clerk. It was not long before the Robber Chief owned the whole forest: the title-deeds, to be sure, belonged to the Abbey, which lay in a fat green meadow at the edge of the wood, but the monks could not work the forest as the robber could, and whatever harvest of gold and of silver, of jewels, of rich cloths from the packs of merchants of the East was to be gathered there, this one man reaped in his own apologetic way, which always seemed to beg pardon of those who were despoiled, for doing them so much good at one time. Soon the country round the forest was his, and yokel, franklin, and squire, Sir Bertram from the

Castle, and the Prior from the Abbey, began to render him accounts, and it came to pass that the Bishop at the capital city, Mertoun, and the King upon his throne, and the strong nobles about him trembled at the robber's name, for the waves of his power flowed out until they met the waves of the sea.

Dearly the Gentle Robber loved his work in all its aspects, and he was master of its least details. A brave fight with a sturdy yeoman going home from market with a half-year's gains was joy to him, and merry in his ears was the sound of the thwack, thwack, thwack of the oaken staves as they fell on head and shoulders; an encounter with a rich merchant's train brought him naught but exhilaration, and the deft, swift

hand that emptied the pack and purse thrilled as it went about its chosen task. There was slow, sensuous pleasure in stripping off the garments of knight and of squire and leaving their limbs uncovered to the cold. Daintiest amusement of all was the spoiling of widow and of orphan: something of the ascetic lingered in the bosom of the Robber Chief, and rare and delicate was the task of emptying the scantily furnished larder, of carrying away the worn clothes, and the single jewel saved from the wreck of happier days. He found delight in feeling about his knees the clasp of the thin arms of the naked orphan as it wept for food, for genius knows no distinction of small and great, and yeoman and squire, knight and merchant, widow and

orphan alike, thrilled him with a sense of his power, and through their cries sang in his ear the word "success."

In the course of time it came to pass that he became the chief support of the kingdom which he had caused to totter as he swept its riches into his own bulging pockets. When he came to court, as he sometimes did, wearing grave apparel and showing a modest face, the King leaned lovingly upon him; was he not financing the war with Binnamere and causing a half-dozen universities, which had but lately come into fashion, to rise in different parts of the land? The Bishop conferred weightily with him in quiet corners; was he not building the great cathedral which was to be the glory of the city throughout coming ages?

"Nay, nay, nay!" said the Bishop, waving a white, jeweled hand as the Chief began to divulge some of his larger plans. "Tell me not of thy wicked schemes! Thy methods I must condemn utterly, but if thou bringest me the money, well, I can at least see to it that it be not used for bad purposes. And speaking of money, we need for the walls of the apse a hundred bags of gold. Dost thou think thou couldst manage it?"

"Ay," said the Gentle Robber, and that night he despoiled nine men, killing three that resisted longest, for he was a great lover of Holy Church, and a devout believer, nor could she ask of him any service that he would not perform.

Now the lust for gold is a strange thing.

There be that gather it together into stockings and go hungry and dirty to the day's end for gold, and that is the miser's lust. There be that win it and spend it again freely for delicate food and fiery drink, and this is the sensualist's lust. There be that get it by cruel means and scatter it abroad on church and hospital, and this is the philanthropist's lust, which possessed the Robber Chief. Gold and jewels were piled so high in his forest cave that he could not see out of its window, and he hardly knew whether winter snow or the shadow of flickering leaves lay on the ground, nor could hungry church nor greedy halls of learning lessen his piles of treasure enough to let the sunlight in.

Far on the edge of the kingdom to east-

HE BEGAN TO WEAR THE LOOK OF THOSE
WHO SEE MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

ward lived blunt Sir Guy of Lamont, and his son and heir was a young squire, Louis by name, who had grown up much alone, wandering in the greenwood that circled the castle. Strong of arm and lusty he grew, yet cared not for the hunt, for he was friend to fox and hare, and the wild deer knew and loved him. Living close to spreading oak and delicate beech, among green leaves and nesting things, he began to wear the look of those who see more than meets the eye, and knight and franklin chaffed him as he sat apart while they grew merry over mug of ale or glass of wine in his father's hall. As he dreamed his dreams and thought his thoughts, rumors of the deeds of the Robber Chief floated to his ears, and he was sorely

puzzled. It was a wandering merchant who brought the tale, spreading out his stuffs of velvet and of silk over table and settle and chair, and showing three great fresh sword-cuts on his arm as he spoke: —

"Andrew, my brother, lost his head in the encounter, and it was severed by a single blow, but I escaped, though there be few that may."

With that he recounted all the tales that he had heard in his wanderings of the wrong-doing of this man, and they were many. Sir Guy listened with "Zounds!" and "'Sdeath!" but the youth said never a word of pity or of blame; yet, when the story-teller had finished, he marveled at the lad's eyes. They were gray eyes, with

lashes dark and long, and the look in them was as the look in the eyes of a gentle beast when he is hurt to the death; then came to them the sudden fire of the avenger of misdeeds.

"My hour has come to fight," said young Louis of Lamont to the great stag that licked his hand that evening in the forest as the sun went down in golden haze. "Men do not know this cruel wrong; I must go to tell them, and mayhap lead them forth with banner and with sword."

Early the next morning, when all were making merry at the hunt, he set the face of his snow-white steed to westward and rode down long, green, leafy ways and across a great level plain toward the set-

ting of the sun. In doublet and hose of scarlet, laced with gold thread, he was comely to see, with a white plume in his velvet cap, and thick hair of yellow, clipped evenly at his neck, and on his face the beauty that shines out from a light within. All day he journeyed on, yearning to meet alone the Robber Chief, whom he pictured as a man brawny of arm and of evil countenance, wherein black brows hid the sinister eyes, and a black beard covered a cruel mouth; and the lad longed with the lusty strength of untried youth to measure swords with this terrible foe. That night a woman gave him shelter at a wayside hut, and told a tale of the Chief that chilled the young man's blood; the next night, as he lodged at a hall, deeds yet more cruel

were recounted to him; and ever as he came nearer the heart of the kingdom, he found the air more rife with tidings of the Robber Chief's ill doings.

"They do not know," he said, lightly touching spur to his steed. "The King and the Bishop do not know of these wicked things. Pray God that I may come in time to lead men forth!"

At the edge of a great forest he met, one day, a tired-looking man on a tired horse. The rider was neatly clad in sober gray, and was both freshly shaven and neatly combed. Across his saddle lay a great bag of something that was wondrous heavy.

"Halt!" said the man, with a pleasant glance from his mild blue eyes. Then blood

rose red to the young squire's cheek, and anger too great for any words lighted in his eyes, as his hand went to his dagger, and he urged his horse forward. It was a brave fight that he made, while the two steeds drew near and parted and drew near again, but a slender white hand with an iron grip reached deftly and snatched the dagger from his hand, nor could he reach the short sword which he had so proudly belted to his side; and the strength of his adversary was as the strength of ten.

"Nay, be not foolish," said a soft voice, as the lad struck out with stinging fist; "'t is but thy purse I ask, and it would grieve me to do thee wrong. The purses of the kingdom belong to me."

"Now, by what right?" cried Louis of

Lamont, between set teeth, his cheeks flaming deeper red.

"By the right of having wit enough to get them," answered the robber. Then he pinioned the lad's arm to his side and thrust a deft hand into his pocket, drawing out a purse of wrought gold.

"It will be to thy best advantage if thou canst but see it that way," he said courteously.

In the mind of the other the vision of dark, beetling brows and red, hairy cheeks was fading.

"Thou — thou art the Robber Chief," he stammered. His adversary bowed.

"It is thou who didst murder Baron Divonne, and who didst starve the Squire's daughter of Yverton with her seven chil-

dren, and"— So great was his horror of the tales that flocked to his tongue that he failed to speak them, but a light as from the wings of the Angel of Judgment shone from his eyes and brow.

"The question is not, 'Shall I take thy purse?'" the Chief said gently. "I have it. The question is, 'How shall I dispose of it to the best advantage?'"

"It is n't that! I do not want the purse," said the young man scornfully; "but how canst thou traffic in crime?"

"I have little time for talking," said the Gentle Robber, with a hurt look on his face; he was extremely sensitive to adverse criticism. "Now I must be off. This great bag of gold is for the orphan hospital at the Abbey. If I may mention it

without boasting, it derives most of its supplies from me," and he looked wistfully for approval.

"Its supplies of orphans?" demanded Louis of Lamont, with his stern young lip curved in scorn; but the face of the other was as the face of a man who has failed to teach a great lesson of good.

As the lad rode on through the forest, his head was bent as if a hand had struck it and had laid it low, but coming into the open, he saw far off, across the valley, the spires of the capital city, Mertoun, and its many red roofs gleaming by the blue river, and his heart throbbed within him for thankfulness and joy.

"Hasten!" he cried to the beast that bore him. "Yonder in that strong city

be strong men to help me right ill deeds, and a minute gained may save some woman's life, or spare the bitter crying of a child."

His eyes were filled with a vision of the knights that would go out with him to war for the right, with the waving of plumes and the flaming of banners, in their hearts the anger of God for cruel wrong ; and a yearning for coming combat tugged at the muscles of shoulder and of arm.

The palace of the Bishop was moated, and there was a drawbridge there, and within, as on a green island, rose walls of fine gray stone, with window arch and doorway delicately carved. There was one at hand who took his steed, and one who led the way for him, and anon he

found himself in a sunlit chamber where the Bishop stood looking out upon the great cathedral which was rising stone by stone, with its blue-clad workmen standing against a bluer sky.

"What is it, my son?" asked the Bishop, when he saw a young squire standing before him, worn, dust-stained, with anger burning in his eyes.

"Sire," said the guest, bending low, "I have hasted thither to tell thee of great wrongs."

"They shall be redressed," said the Bishop, laying his hand upon the lad's head.

"There is a man," said Louis of Lamont, kneeling, his lips white with wrath, "who doeth cruel wrong and bringeth folk to

death, and it must needs be that none in high places know, for he goeth unpunished."

"He shall be found and placed in my lowest dungeon," said the Bishop fiercely. "Now tell me what he hath done."

"On my way hither I lodged with a poor woman who told me that he had slain before her eyes her husband and her sons, and all for a cup of silver coin that stood upon the mantel."

"A mere cup of silver coin!" groaned the Bishop. "He shall hang."

Then he told of the murder of Baron Divonne, and of the Squire's daughter of Yverton, who was starved with her seven children; and he told all the tales that the wandering merchant had brought with his

cloths of cashmere and of silk. As he spoke longer, the face of his host grew anxious, and when he finished, saying, "Men call him the Gentle Robber," black care sat upon the brow of the host.

"Delay not," pleaded Louis. "Give me armed men, for thou hast said that he shall die for his sins, and I have the blood of fighters in my veins."

"Nay, child," said the Bishop. "Not so."

"Thou hast promised!" he cried in amaze.

"Ay," he made answer, "but I knew not then that the offenses were so many and so great, or that the enterprise was — ahem! — planned upon so large a scale. That makes all different."

"That makes the need to punish him a thousandfold greater," stammered the lad.

"Tut, tut!" said the Bishop, with the solemn smile he wore. "Thou dost not understand: logic is ever lacking in the young."

"Should not stripes be laid upon him for each cry he hath drawn forth? Should he not lay down his life, if that were possible, for each life he hath taken?"

"I had thought, when I heard the first tale, that he should die for the single crime," the Bishop made answer, "but the case is altered by the later facts. 'A life for a life,' saith the Scripture, but naught of a life for a dozen or threescore, or an hundred, as the case may be."

Then a flame of anger shone out in the lad's face, and he waited.

"My son," said the Bishop tenderly, "thou art young and ignorant, yet will I try to teach thee something of right ways of thought. In judging, all depends upon the point of view, and matters that look often black at first statement grow white or gray when thoroughly understood. Let us look upon this question in another aspect. Dost see yonder great cathedral rising?"

Though the youth made no answer, the Bishop saw that he was looking at the gray stones and at the blue-clad workmen.

"'T is God's house," said the Bishop, "nor may it arise save through the gifts of this man. Wrong hath he done, but all is forgiven for that his gold is bent to holy purposes."

"But wrong he doeth still," said Louis of Lamont, in the stern voice of youth.

The Bishop coughed behind his hand even while he spoke.

"There is much in the ways of Providence that we may not comprehend. God moveth in a mysterious way."

"Had the Robber Chief ceased from his crime and shown true penitence" — began the lad, but the Bishop interrupted.

"God hath need of the man and of all the gold that he will bring, that institutions of learning and holy places may arise in the land."

"God may be worshiped by wood and stream," said the youth, in the still, small voice of one who knew; "nor hath He need of gold that is the price of suffering

and pain and tears;" and so he turned and went down the steps, worn and weary, with dust on his crimson garments, and shame on his spirit, and the light of his face grown dim.

It had come back to its shining, however, the next day, when he went before the King.

"It may well be that there is one bad man who hath power," he said to himself, "and he the Bishop; but God would not grant that all be so," and hope beamed again from his eyes.

"'T is the son of my old friend, Guy of Lamont, sayest thou?" cried the King, as he raised the lad's chin with one royal finger. "By my troth, 't is his father's face again, but different."

"Sire," said Louis, as he did reverence, "I have come to tell of cruel wrong, and to win from thee a promise of redress."

"Thou shalt have it!" cried the King, with his hand upon his sword. "Friend or child of my friend went never yet uncomforted from the foot of my throne. Speak thy wrong."

Then the youth told him all that he had told the Bishop, and added thereto other tales, and hope shone sternly in his eyes.

"Send forth with me a band of thy men-at-arms," prayed the suppliant. "Even now, perchance, are orphans made that might have grown tall in happiness save for this man's lust for gold."

Then the King looked about, and his face grew dark with anger, for some half

FOR SOME HALF SMILED AND HID THEIR SMILES AS BEST THEY COULD

smiled and hid their smiles as best they could with jeweled hand or velvet sleeve; some showed fear at seeing this thing, which was not breathed at court, boldly brought to light.

"Boy," said the King sternly, "hast no respect for them that be appointed to sit in high places, nor awe before an anointed King?"

"Yea, sire," answered Louis, marveling.

"Dost come before my throne with slanderous tales of one on whom I lean heavily and lovingly?"

"Sire," he said bravely, "thou dost not know his cruel deeds. He hath robbed and killed to the sickening of the heart."

"Mayhap," said the King, "but he hath carried all before him with great success,

and so is the case altered. 'T is a man of whom we have great need, and the young should not speak ill of older folk."

Then Louis of Lamont said never a word, but rose to his feet staggering, for the knowledge he had gained of men came as hard blows about the ears, and bending low, he turned away.

"Stay!" cried the King. "Thy offense is great: thou hast spoken ill of a public benefactor, yet if thou wilt hold thy tongue, nor repeat thy silly tales, I will make thee one of my courtiers, and thou shalt go brave in velvet and in jewels."

But the youth shook his head and went forth alone from the presence-chamber; all looked after him, with smiles and jeers and whispered words of scorn.

"'Sdeath!" cried the King. "'T is a madman fit but for a dungeon, yet, for the sake of my old friend, Guy of Lamont, can I not cast him there."

The lad groped his way unevenly down the marble steps of the palace as one gropes in a path that is full of pitfalls and has suddenly grown dark, and he wandered, not knowing where, through the dark streets, until he found himself in the square before the great cathedral. Here many were passing with hands full of flowers, red roses and tall white lilies and blue blossoms that grow pale among the wheat, for it was the feast day of a saint, and they went to deck the altar which stood within unfinished walls, that men might worship there under the blue sky.

"I will tell them," said the lad; so he stood upon the cathedral steps and repeated all the tale, and blossoms red and blossoms white were dropped at his feet, as men and women clustered about to hear.

"Ay!" they cried out, "we go hungry for this man, but who shall deliver us from him? Horses and armor could we find, perchance. Wilt lead us to him?"

Then of a sudden he smiled, and ceased speaking because of the choking in his throat; but after, he took up the tale and told it in the market-place and before the Palace of Justice and wherever he could gather folk together.

As days passed, all this came to the ears of the King and of the Bishop and of the nobles of the court, and grave

head met with grave head, and both were shaken solemnly in conference over this new peril which threatened the kingdom. One morn there went throughout the city a crier, who called aloud and read from a parchment in his hand to let men know that Louis of Lamont, son of Sir Guy, was cast out from Holy Church for slander of one of her greatest sons. Henceforward no man should give him shelter, no woman food or drink, lest they too come under the ban; and should he speak future evil words, his life would be forfeit.

Yet one who loved him — and there were many — hid him; and the next day and the next he wandered in the streets, begging men to rise in vengeance against the Robber Chief. On the third day he

was taken by armed men, and the decree went forth that Louis of Lamont should, after three days, be burned at the stake in the square of the Palace of Justice. The youth smiled when he heard his doom; almost he was glad to escape from a world which he had not logic enough to understand.

So the day came when he should die, and it was a Friday of midsummer. In the centre of the square stood an iron post to which criminals were wont to be tied, and to this they bound him. Close about him were heaped fagots of wood and dried branches, and within he stood in a motley garment, and the look upon his face was as the coming of the day. All about was a great press of people, merchant and

butcher and cloth-spinner, and peasant folk from the country round; and on a dais, built high for better seeing, were knights and ladies and nobles of the court, with the King himself, and the Gentle Robber at his side, trimly clad in sober gray and gently smiling.

It was a soft day of golden sun, and the sky was blue above the place, and the least wind sighed softly as if for pity as it breathed about the iron stake and played with the yellow locks of the young Squire's hair and moved the red folds of the shameful garment that they had placed upon him. Lifting his face, he leaned his cheek against the wind, for it seemed to him a breeze that had played among the beech leaves in the ancient forest by his father's

hall, and in taking leave of it he said farewell to his hound and to the woodland paths and to his father's face.

Now came a ghostly father, with a torch that flamed backward against the blue day, and in the name of God and Holy Church he bent and kindled the fagots. Then was there quick tumult and rush and stir through the square, for all rushed forward to see and to hear, and little maids were sorely trampled in the press by the great feet of smith and of husbandman, and women's aprons were badly torn. None cared, for all knew that saving grace was to be won for their own souls if their eyes but caught a glimpse of an heretic that was being burned to death, and when the fire leaped high into the air, they gave

A GLIMPSE OF AN HERETIC BEING BURNED TO DEATH

God thanks. There was a flame in the young martyr's face that was not as the flame that leaped about him; but smoke and fire were speedy with their work, and his head bent over his breast, his body over the chain that bound him, and as his soul went free, folk breathed deeply in relief, saying that an evil-doer was dead. Upon the dais the King's broad face showed satisfaction; the Bishop lifted his eyes to heaven, thanking God, then let them rest on the gray stone walls of the cathedral, glad that now naught should prevent the walls of God's house from rising. In all the great crowd, none other was so devout and so thankful as the Gentle Robber, and his mild blue eyes were moist with tears as he whispered to the King: —

"'T is marvelous, the ways by which Providence brings evil-doers to justice; ever the right prevails."

Then all went to the cathedral, knight, squire, and lady in velvet and in silk, the Bishop in holy robes of purple and of white, and common folk in blue jean and plain linen, that special service might be held in praise for this great deliverance, and the *Te Deum* sung.

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE · MASSACHUSETTS
U · S · A

A CHARMING NEW
CHRISTMAS STORY

BY

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

THE OLD PEABODY PEW

It is hard to read this story without tears, and it is impossible to do so without laughter. A Christmas romance of a country church, it is one of the best short stories that Mrs. Wiggin has ever written, both for its humor and pathos, and for that veritable touch of genius by which this popular author's best work is always inspired. It is the story of a country courtship begun and ended, after many years, in the Old Peabody Pew. The life in a New England village stands out with all the vividness of a Dutch painting. It is all so true and at the same time so inimitably humorous, that the happy outcome of the love story seems as inevitable as the simple trust which underlies its plot.

Mrs. Alice Barber Stephens has furnished some characteristic illustrations, and the book is beautifully decorated with marginal designs in color and has a handsome pictorial cover.

Crown 8vo, $1.50

HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & CO.

BOSTON NEW YORK

Boston Public Library
3 9999 10503 694 9

The Princess Pourquoi

Margaret Sherwood